

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

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Musician Dave Matthews

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SATURDAY, MARCH 5, 2005

New combat badge elicits complaints

CCB would honor many, but excludes some in the line of fire Page 4

All eyes on Martha

Domestic diva's release from
prison dominates airwaves Page 9



AP photos

Left: Martha Stewart waves as she boards a plane Friday morning after being released from the Alderson Federal Reformatory for Women in Alderson, W.Va. Above: A television crew sets up in front of Stewart's \$16 million home in Katonah, N.Y., on Friday. She'll spend the next five months in home confinement there as mandated by her conviction last March for lying to the government about the events surrounding the sale of 4,000 shares of stock.

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News Tracker ... What's new with old news

World

Afghan poppy spraying: U.S. drug czar John Walters on Friday denied reports that the United States or its allies have sprayed pesticides on poppy crops in Afghanistan as part of the battle against illegal narcotics.

The United States has discussed with Afghan President Hamid Karzai the option of spraying to fight Afghanistan's trade in poppy-based opium, but "it's not happening this year," Walters said.

"We have been working with President Karzai, who has been steadfast and clear that the production of opium has to be reduced," Walters told reporters in Paris.

Missile defense talks: Indian and American officials wound up two-day talks on missile defense Friday, ahead of the first official visit by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the foreign ministry said.

"The two sides continued discussions on issues related to missile defense and highlighted the security contribution that missile defenses can make," foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna told a news conference.

American defense officials briefed their Indian counterparts on the newest developments in the U.S. missile defense program at meetings in the southern city of Hyderabad, he said.

Engine problems on jet: A British Airways jet that continued on an 11-hour flight from Los Angeles to London after one of its four engines lost power also flew on three engines on a later flight from Singapore to London, the airline said Friday.

The Boeing 747 left Singapore on Feb. 25 and landed at London's Heathrow Airport the next day, arriving only 15 minutes behind schedule, BA spokesman Jay Marriott said.

Three hours into the 14-hour flight, an oil pressure indicator showed there was a problem with one of the engines, which the captain shut down as a precaution, Marriott said. It was the captain's decision to continue with Flight 18, which was carrying 356 passengers, he added.

Jiang Zemin's retirement: Former Chinese President Jiang Zemin submitted his resignation Friday from his last official post as chairman of a largely ceremonial government military panel, completing a long-planned retirement, the government said.

Jiang, 78, submitted his request to resign as chairman of the government's Central Military Commission to leaders of China's parliament, the official Xinhua News Agency announced.

The commission has no major powers over the military, which is run by a parallel panel of the ruling Communist Party. Jiang handed over his post as chairman of that party commission in September to President Hu Jintao, who earlier succeeded him as party leader.

States

Colorado serial rapes case: Police Chief Ricky Bennett has resigned over the department's release of a man who admitted molesting an 8-year-old boy and who is suspected of committing at least five rapes.

Mayor Ed Tauer said Bennett stepped



Nepal government: Policemen detain activists with the United Marxist Leninist Communist Party Nepal during an anti-monarchy rally in Katmandu, Nepal, on Friday. Nepal's government has extended by two months the house arrest of five top political leaders who were detained after the king sacked the government and took power on Feb. 1, officials said.

down Thursday to become a district captain voluntarily, but city officials were considering removing him from the post.

City Manager Ron Miller and Deputy City Manager Frank Rangan, Bennett's direct supervisor, were suspended Wednesday for two weeks without pay.

Robert Blake trial: Robert Blake's lawyer called the prosecution's case against the actor ridiculous, stressing in closing arguments that the former "Baretta" star is not responsible for finding his wife's killer.

"Mr. Blake doesn't have a burden of solving this crime," defense attorney M. Gerald Schwartzbach told the jury Thursday. Schwartzbach also scoffed at the idea Blake would have killed wife Bonny Lee Bakley in his own neighborhood while she waited in a car parked under a street light.

Terror money trial: Documents, videotapes and secretly recorded conversations prove a Yemeni sheik and his assistant gave vital support to some of the world's deadliest terrorists, including Osama bin Laden, a federal prosecutor charged in closing arguments Thursday.

"Although these defendants didn't strap bombs onto themselves or fly planes into the World Trade Center, they're indispensable to the people who do," prosecutor Pamela Chen told jurors in Brooklyn federal court.

Attorneys for Sheikh Mohammed Ali Hassan al-Mogayad and his assistant, Mohammed Mohsen Yahya Zayed, countered that prosecutors used an untruthful informant motivated by greed to build a case that played on anti-Muslim prejudice.

Washington election challenge: Republicans have released 1,135 names of alleged felons who they say illegally cast ballots in the governor's race that Democrat Christine Gregoire won by 129 votes.

The list turned over to Democratic Party lawyers on Thursday contained the names and addresses of the alleged felons, along with 45 people who Republicans say died before the Nov. 2 election but who were listed

as having voted.

"It's one more significant piece of evidence that this past election was not only deeply flawed but that we don't know who won," said Mary Lane, a spokeswoman for Republican opponent Dino Rossi, who is challenging the results in court. "Christine Gregoire is not the legitimately elected governor."

Flu season: After all the panic last fall over the vaccine shortage, the flu season is turning out to be milder than last year's severe bout, but it may not have peaked yet, the government said Thursday.

"It doesn't look like it's as severe as last year, but it's too early to tell," said Lynnette Brammer of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's influenza branch.

Eric Rudolph bombing case: A federal judge Thursday refused to throw out the death penalty case against Eric Rudolph, rejecting defense claims that the serial bomber suspect should be tried under a law that doesn't allow capital punishment.

In a brief order, U.S. District Judge Lynnwood Smith accepted the recommendation of a magistrate judge who ruled Rudolph could face death if convicted in the deadly bombing of a Birmingham abortion clinic in 1998.

The defense claimed Rudolph should be tried under the 1994 Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, which carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment for abortion clinic attacks resulting in death.

Military

James River Ghost Fleet: A federal judge has dismissed a lawsuit filed by two environmental groups objecting to plans for 13 deteriorating vessels in the so-called James River Ghost Fleet to be towed to Great Britain for dismantling and scrapping.

The lawsuit, filed in the fall of 2003 by Basel Action Network and the Sierra Club, claimed that the export of the aging ships would violate federal environmental laws.

Stories and photo from The Associated Press

Correction

In one version of a March 3 story about the effect of homeland security measures on Zippo Manufacturing Co., The Associated Press erroneously described the company's classic lighter. It is an absorbed fuel lighter, not a butane lighter.

Comics, horoscopes and advice
every day in Stars and Stripes



Iraqi police officers attend to the scene of a car bomb, which police said killed one civilian, in Baquba, 35 miles northeast of Baghdad, on Friday.

Kidnapped journalist heads home to Italy

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — An Italian journalist captured in Iraq a month ago was freed Friday, the Italian government said, while 11 Iraqis were killed in clashes and attacks amid a violent week in the war-torn nation.

Giuliana Sprea, 56, who works for the left-wing *Il Manifesto* newspaper, might be back in Rome later Friday, said Italy's Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs Margherita Boniver. The release "is confirmed 100 percent," Boniver told Sky TG24 television news.

Italian news agency Apcom that a U.S. armored car fired on the vehicle that was carrying the journalist.

The agency said Sprea was injured during efforts to rescue her, and an Italian secret service agent was killed and another was injured. No more information was given.

Foreign Minister Gianfranco Fini expressed "great joy and enormous satisfaction," the ANSA news agency said. The *Al-Jazeera* television network first reported the journalist's release.

The journalist's father was so overwhelmed by the news that he needed assistance from a doctor, ANSA said. "This is an exceptional day," Franco Sprea was quoted as saying.

Sprea, who was abducted in Baghdad on Feb. 4, was shown in a video pleading for her life and demanding that all foreign troops — including Italian forces — leave Iraq.

Her reported release came as U.S. forces clashed with insurgents, killing three. Residents of an Iraqi town killed another seven militants and a car bomb left another man dead northeast of the capital.

Also Friday, two members of the Shiite-led United Iraqi Alliance dropped out of the political group because of its inability to carve out a deal for a new prime minister.

after historic Jan. 30 elections.

The alliance took 140 of the 275 seats in the National Assembly, the body charged with writing a new constitution. But it needs support from other parties to muster the required two-thirds majority to insure control of top posts in the new government.

The members who dropped out included one of its more well-known supporters, Abdul-Karim Mahmoud al-Mohammedawi. Dubbed "Prince of the Marshes," al-Mohammedawi led the resistance movement against Saddam Hussein in the southern marsh region.

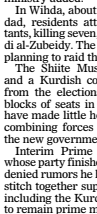
The other was Ali Hashim al-Youshaa, one of the alliance's leaders.

A car bomb in Baquba on Friday killed one man and wounded four others, the defense ministry said. In other violence, three militants were killed in clashes between U.S. soldiers and insurgents in Baghdad, 90 miles west of Baghdad, the ministry added.

In Wihda, about 25 miles south of Baghdad, residents attacked a group of militants, killing seven, said police Capt. Hamadi al-Zubeidi. The militants were allegedly planning to raid the town.

The Shiite Muslim-dominated alliance and a Kurdish coalition, which emerged from the elections with the two biggest blocks of seats in the National Assembly, have made little headway in their talks on combining forces to select the leaders of the new government.

Interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, whose party finished third, on Friday again denied rumors he had given up his effort to stitch together support from other groups, including the Kurds, that would allow him to remain prime minister.



Sprea

Man charged with trying to sell spies to Saddam

BY JEANINE IBRAHIM

The Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — A federal grand jury has indicted an Indiana man on charges he tried to sell names of U.S. intelligence operatives in Iraq to Saddam Hussein's government before the U.S. invasion.

Shaaban Hafiz Ahmad Al Shaaban, 52, was charged with agreeing to act as a foreign agent for Iraq and with immigration violations, federal prosecutors said Thursday following Shaaban's arrest.

Shaaban traveled in late 2002 from Chicago to Baghdad, where he agreed to sell the names of U.S. intelligence agents to Saddam's government for \$3 million, said Susan Brooks, the U.S. attorney for southern Indiana. The Iraqi government paid for the trip, the indictment alleges.

"The deal was never consummated," Brooks said.

Shaaban sought the names from foreign sources, but investigators believe he never obtained them, Brooks said. Investigators believe Shaaban acted alone.

The U.S. severed all diplomatic relations with Iraq in 1990 and U.S. citizens were not

permitted to travel to Iraq or do business there without registering as foreign agents — which Shaaban had not done, Brooks said.

Brooks said she could not discuss what sparked the federal investigation of Shaaban, a resident of Greencfield, which is about 20 miles east of Indianapolis.

The federal indictment unsealed Thursday also alleges Shaaban sought to broadcast pro-Iraq propaganda in the United States and offered to pay Iraqis who agreed to act as "human shields" to protect infrastructure from coalition forces, Brooks said.

Authorities believe that Shaaban is originally from Jordan and became a U.S. citizen illegally in 2000 when he used the alias Shaaban Hafeed on his naturalization application. Convicted of that charge, he most likely will be deported, Brooks said.

An initial hearing was held Thursday in Indianapolis federal court, where his trial was tentatively set for April 25. Shaaban is being held pending a detention hearing March 9.

Bill Daze, the federal defense attorney representing Shaaban, did not immediately return calls seeking comment.

Iraqi scholar claims Iran and Syria are hurting democracy

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The head of a small secular political party in Iraq who lost his two sons in a suicide bombing last month is making the rounds of the U.S. capital to warn that Iran and Syria are trying to thwart democracy in his country.

"I am trying to explain the situation in Iraq," Mithal Jamal Hussein Al-Alusi said. "I am trying to make it clear to everybody that the Iranian and Syrian governments are against liberalization in Iraq."

"They listened, and in some ways I think they agreed," he said Friday.

Al-Alusi is from a scholarly and religious Sunni Arab family in Iraq. He was sentenced to death in absentia in 1976 — he was studying aeronautical engineering in Cairo at the time — for trying to undermine Saddam Hussein's control of the Baath party.

He escaped to Syria, then moved to Germany, returning in 2003 after Saddam was overthrown by U.S.-led forces. Last year he was expelled from Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress for attending a terrorist conference in Israel.

"I think we and Israel have the same in-

terest, and there is no reason to have war," he told a reporter. "They are a democratic country and they are very close to America, as we hope to be, so that our own interests we have to start a dialogue and establish peace."

Al-Alusi is trying to build a new party, the Democratic Party of the Iraqis. It fielded 25 candidates in Iraq's elections Jan. 30 for an interim assembly. He said it received 4,290 votes, "not bad for a small party."

He escaped injury in the suicide bombing in Baghdad, but his brother, Ayman, 29, and Jamal, 19, were among 21 people killed in the attack. An affiliate of al-Qaida al-Qaeda al-Baath party claimed responsibility.

The two organizations have vowed to kill Al-Alusi, who is returning to Iraq next week.

Al-Alusi said he was telling administration officials and members of Congress that the Islamic parties in Iraq are very close to Iran and have the same ideology and the same goals.

"I am trying to explain that we are in the beginning of a process and we should have a red line and be very careful and remember what Hitler did. We must democracy to control the people," he said.

U.S. deaths in Iraq

The Associated Press

As of Thursday, at least 1,502 members of the U.S. military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count. At least 1,141 died as a result of hostile action, according to the Defense Department. The figures include four military civilians.

The AP count is eight higher than the Defense Department's tally, last updated at 10 a.m. EST Thursday.

The British military has reported 86 deaths: Iraq, 20; Ukraine, 18; Poland, 17; Spain, 11; Bulgaria, seven; Slovakia, three; Estonia, Thailand and the Netherlands, two each; and Denmark, El Salvador, Hungary, Latvia and Kazakhstan one death each.

Since May 1, 2003, when President Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq had ended, 1,364 U.S. military members have died, according to AP's count. That includes at least 1,032 deaths resulting from hostile action, according to the military's numbers.

The latest deaths reported by the military:

■ Two soldiers were killed Wednesday after their vehicle hit an explosive in central Baghdad.

The latest identifications reported by the military:

■ Army Sgt. Robert Shane Pugh, 25, Meridian, Miss.; killed Wednesday near Iskandariyah, Iraq; assigned to the Mississippi National Guard, Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 155th Infantry, McComb, Miss.

Engineer for attack but not combat badge

Some feel new CCB excludes their specialty from deserved recognition

BY CHARLIE COON
Stars and Stripes

KIRKUK, Iraq — It's a matter of respect, according to Spc. Manny Horned. "When you walk around, it says 'This is what I did, this is what I earned,'" said Horned, a New Jersey Army National Guardsman with the 50th Main Support Battalion at Forward Operating Base Speicher.

The new Close Combat Badge is a good idea that would be made better if more soldiers were eligible for it, according to some who just finished a 60-mile convoy to deliver fuel, water and other supplies to FOB Warrior in Kirkuk.

The Army announced the creation of the new badge in February to recognize soldiers with combat arms specialties. It will be available to those soldiers later this year.

But a lot of soldiers are upset that they would not be eligible for the new badge because their specialty doesn't qualify. Among the specialties that don't qualify are transportation, military police or others not performing infantry work.

"I definitely think more than a few MOSs should get it," said 1st Lt. Julie Nagle of the 642nd Military Intelligence Battalion, who said her troops have engaged in combat.

"A lot of the National Guard don't do their MOSs when they get over here," said Horned, a transportation specialist. "When you're walking around in your (camouflage uniforms), nothing is going to be there to show what you've done."

To others, getting a combat badge didn't matter.

"I don't really care. I'm here to do a job," said Spc. Darrin Greeno a mechanic and truck driver with the 50th MSB and the Minnesota Army National Guard. "If I get attacked and nothing happens to me, it's a good day."

"Some people need [a badge] to prove a point. As long as I come home, that's all I need to prove to people."

Another soldier added that he liked the way the Marine Corps does it — no badges.

"They're all riflemen," the soldier said.

The Close Combat Badge, or CCB, is supposed to be the equivalent of the Combat Infantryman Badge, which was established during World War II to recognize infantrymen and Special Forces soldiers whose specialties would likely put them in harm's way.

But in Iraq, there are no front lines, where infantry would normally be placed. Instead, while infantry units work in many places, anyone heading out the front gate faces the prospect of combat.

The proposed new badge is already creating a stir among the military ranks. Some letters this week to Stars and Stripes from readers downrange say the badge's criteria is too limited and slighters MPs, mechanics and others who often find themselves in battle, but would not be eligible to earn the new badge.

One letter writer said, "If the brass in Washington think that 12 (combat engineer and bridge crew badge), 13 (field artillery) and 19 (armor) series soldiers are the only ones out there risking their lives, they need to come to Iraq and open their eyes. I hope the criteria for the badge from what has been suggested. Everyone who went outside the wire to en-



CHARLIE COON/Stars and Stripes

Spcs. Rex Buchanan, left, and Darrin Greeno, driver-mechanics from the Minnesota Army National Guard and 50th Main Support Battalion, based at Forward Operating Base Speicher in Tikrit, Iraq, talk after escorting a convoy Tuesday to FOB Warrior in Kirkuk. They have different opinions on the new Close Combat Badge. Buchanan thinks all soldiers should be eligible for the Close Combat Badge; Greeno said all the proof of his service he needs is to return home alive.

gaged the enemy deserves the same recognition, regardless of their MOS."

Army officials late last month said troops' service is commendable, but the badge is designed to recognize those with an infantry mission.

Others downrange echo the letter writer.

Riding with Greeno in their Hemitz wrecker and recovery truck was Spc. Rex Buchanan, also with the 50th MSB. Like Greeno, he drives the truck, can repair it and tow vehicles.

Buchanan was happy to get his combat patch, a rainbow on his right shoulder that signifies his service in theater for the 42nd Infantry Division, also known as the Rainbow Division. It is Buchanan's 20th year in the military but his first time overseas and first time in combat.

A badge to wear over the left breast pocket would be appropriate for anyone who earned it, he said.

"I hear about these guys going out and drawing small-arms fire and getting [attacked by roadside bombs]," Buchanan said. "They should have a patch or something that says, 'Thanks for doing what you're doing.'"

All soldiers are trained on their weapons and have to follow the rules of engagement like anyone else, noted Spc. Hermine Medina of the 16th Quartermaster Company.

The insurgents don't aim at just infantrymen, said Medina, a laundry specialist who also rides, locked and loaded, in convoys. "They're going to harm you no matter what."

Even soldiers who are normally confined on a base, such as Spc. Edward Haskins, a mechanic with the 16th Quartermaster Company, could face combat. The 500-mile convoy that took him from Kuwait into Iraq could have turned into battle.

Said Haskins of the trip: "You were in harm's way every day."

E-mail Charlie Coon at: coonc@mail.strips.osd.mil

What is it?

A new badge being offered to some soldiers in direct combat missions similar to infantry and Special Forces.

Who's eligible?

Soldiers with the following military occupational specialties of armor, cavalry, combat engineer and field artillery, and who participate in ground combat. Officers in those units are also eligible.

History

The Army announced the creation of the badge in February. Additional details are expected to be released this month. The badge will be retroactive from October 2001.

Badge designs debated

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, Iraq — Maybe they should all be the same. Or perhaps they could all be different to reflect a soldier's military occupational specialty.

While many soldiers said they thought every-

one facing combat should be awarded some type of badge, few could agree on what the Close Combat Badge should look like.

The Army, which recently announced the new badge, has not released information about its design.

"I think the engineer corps, signal, artillery, (military police) should design their own," said Spc. Garrett Nodell of the 983rd Engineer Battalion. "I want to wear something that reflects engineering."

Nodell suggested a badge with a hammer or ax.

The background could be baby blue, like that of the traditional Combat Infantryman Badge, said Spc. Stan Eichelberger of 1st Battalion, 33rd Field Artillery Regiment. The CIB shows a musket on a baby blue background with a white crosshair.

"To signal the infantry part of

it," Eichelberger said. "Maybe they could tie all the [MOSs] together in one crest that reflects all the MOSs."

Staff Sgt. Jason Ohm of the 983rd's Headquarters Support Company and a veteran of Operation Desert Storm, hadn't thought about it much because he works as a cook and carpenter and isn't eligible.

He thought if the new badge had a baby blue background like the infantry

badge, it would just confuse people.

"Then everybody would just think you were infantry," Ohm said.

Then he added that one badge should cover all the various specialties if its wearer participated in infantry-style combat.

"One thing across the board," Ohm said.

Ohm's unit mate, Spc. Terry Rice, agreed.

"Why change the combat badge; it's been here all these years," Rice said. "To me, if you start separating everything from everything else, it doesn't respect the soldier."

"It should be one Army, one fight," — Charlie Coon

Defense spending debate

WASHINGTON — House Republicans on Thursday proposed spending \$18 billion more on defense needs President Bush has requested for conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and cutting by about half his proposal for foreign aid and State Department programs.

Portraying our troops is the number one reason for the supplemental," said Rep. Jerry Lewis, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, as he released its version of the war package.

The overall price tag is \$81.1 billion, just below the president's \$81.9 billion proposal.

Congress is likely to approve legislation very much resembling Bush's overall package this spring. House leaders hope their chamber will approve their bill later this month but the Senate isn't expected to produce its version until April.

Some have said Bush's request for \$4.6 billion to make Army brigades more self-sufficient could wait until next year's regular defense bill. Even so, the money is in the committee's bill.

Grenade fratricide trial

FORT BRAGG, N.C. — Lawyers for an Army sergeant charged with killing two other soldiers in a grenade attack in Kuwait said Friday that some autopsy photos are too shocking to show a jury.

Prosecutors want to show jurors in the court-martial of Sgt. Hasan Akbar more than a dozen autopsy photos of the dead officers to identify the victims as well as show their manner of death.

A defense lawyer said the government

could accomplish its aim by showing only the less gruesome of the pictures.

"It's far better by looking at some of these pictures that their purpose is inflaming the panel," Maj. Dan Brookhart said.

Brookhart said the government doesn't need to arouse the panelists. He said the defense intends to acknowledge the manner of the victims' death and argue that Akbar, who confessed several times, either had diminished mental capacity or was insane when the attacks occurred.

From The Associated Press

Former Iraq inspector criticizes U.S. 'spin'

BY CHARLES J. HANLEY

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Iraq's nuclear past and Iran's possible nuclear future should spur the world toward making the Middle East — including Israel — a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, arms expert Hans Blix says.

After all, Blix points out, even without Saddam Hussein the "new" world has the technical know-how to resurrect its nuclear bomb program if it feels threatened by neighbors.

The former chief U.N. arms inspector, who helped oversee the dismantling of Iraq's weapons programs, sets out proposals for a less "nuclearized" world in a 27-page epilogue to a new, paperback edition of his book "Disarming Iraq," first published a year ago.

In the intervening year, more evidence

has accumulated to debunk U.S. claims that Iraq had current nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programs, the Bush administration's stated rationale for invading that country two years ago. American arms hunters now acknowledge the weapons didn't exist.

Blix's criticism of U.S. leaders and their British allies, sometimes muted in the past, grows sharper in this updated book, published by Bloomsbury of London.

Their "exaggeration and spin" and "shrill" claims "helped to mislead the world into believing there were stocks of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq ready for use," the Swedish ex-diplomat writes of the Bush White House and British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

The chief U.S. weapons hunter, Charles Duelfer, has conceded that the ousted government of President Saddam hadn't built such arms since 1991, when U.N. inspec-

tors, including experts of the Blix-led International Atomic Energy Agency, began destroying weapons stocks and equipment after the first Gulf War.



Blix

planned but that the Bush administration repeatedly ignored in raising alarms over a supposed Iraqi threat.

Now, with the U.N. inspectors driven out by the U.S.-British invasion, Iraq still has "the theoretical and technical know-how" to revive advanced weapons programs, Blix writes, including the expertise built up by hundreds of Iraqi nuclear scientists and engineers in the atom-bomb project that was aborted in 1991.

Add to that neighboring Iran's status as a "near nuclear weapon state," one whose secretive program is the subject of international negotiation, and the situation "should trigger a more active discussion of the idea of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, including Israel and Iran," Blix writes.

Although Israel will neither confirm nor deny it, experts believe it has between 75 and 200 nuclear weapons.

Blix now leads an international Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, financed by the Swedish government.

Al-Qaida launches Web-based magazine

BY RAWYA RAGEH

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — A new online magazine purportedly posted by al-Qaida's affiliate in Iraq has launched an effort to recruit Muslims to rid Iraq of infidels and apostates — its names for Americans and their Iraqi partners.

The colorful, well-designed magazine is named *Zurwat al-Sanaam*, Arabic for *Tip of the Camel's Hump* — a reference among Islamic militants to "the epitome of belief and virtuous activity."

The inaugural 43-page issue was posted two days after al-Qaida in Iraq, the group led by Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, claimed responsibility for an attack Monday against police and army recruits that killed 125 people in Hillah, just south of Baghdad.

The group has also said it was behind car bombings and attacks that killed 14 police officers Wednesday. Al-Zarqawi's organization has been blamed for many of the bombings, kidnappings and beheadings in Iraq.

Washington-based counterterrorism expert Evan Kohlmann said the magazine aims at "conveying the sense that the organization is professional, credible and really understands what they're doing."

It was designed as "an attempt to give the idea that al-Zarqawi and these people are desperate ... It shows that these people have not on their hands and don't have to worry about mobility."

Maysam al-Iraqi, the designated "media coordinator" for al-Zarqawi's group, posted the magazine on the Internet late Wednesday.

Saved as an attachment, it has appeared on at least two extremist Islamic Web sites that have previously posted al-Qaida statements



This is the front cover of an online magazine purportedly posted by al-Qaida's affiliate in Iraq, launching an effort to recruit Muslims to join its campaign to drive the *Zurwat al-Sanaam*, Arabic for "The Tip of the Camel's Hump." This image was downloaded from the Internet, and the Associated Press was unable to independently verify its content.

and claims of responsibility.

Mainly a rehash of letters, tracts and texts that have previously appeared on the Internet, the magazine includes a vow of fealty from al-Zarqawi to Osama bin Laden and a pledge to keep fighting.

It also includes excerpts from a bin Laden letter commending al-Zarqawi's fighters. The letter appears to be a patchwork of past speeches made by bin Laden.

The cover includes al-Qaida in Iraq's logo of an AK-47 standing in an open Quran, with a globe in the background and an arm and

finger pointed upward. It also has pictures of President Bush, bin Laden and Abu Anas al-Shami — the late spiritual leader of al-Qaida in Iraq.

The magazine includes a profile of al-Shami, who was killed in a September airstrike in the western Baghdad suburb of Abu Ghraib.

Al-Shami, a Palestinian, was a close aide to al-Zarqawi.

It says "enlightening Muslims and calling upon the people to follow the faith and way of Sunnis" was its main goal. Dated February 2005, it promised to be the first of many issues.

Attack in Iraq kills two ex-servicemen

The Associated Press

MINDEN, Nev. — Two former U.S. servicemen working in Iraq for a private security company based in Nevada were killed Thursday in an attack on a convoy near Al Ashraf, a company spokesman said.

Jimmy A. Riddle, 53, of The Colony, Texas, and Brian J. Wagner, 30, Fayetteville, N.C., were together in a vehicle escorting a convoy of contractors to an ammunition storage point in Al Ashraf when an explosive device was detonated, destroying the vehicle and killing both men, the spokesman said. They worked for Special Operations Consulting-Security Management Group Inc., or SOC-SMG, based in Minden, spokesman Anthony Casas said in a statement.

They were providing security to Tetra Tech FW Inc., which is

under contract with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to destroy and capture enemy munitions in Iraq, he said. The attack occurred about 7:20 a.m. Iraq time on Thursday, he said.

Riddle, who served in the U.S. Marine Corps, also had worked for the Texas probation department and several law enforcement agencies before SOC-SMG hired him in November 2003.

Wagner, who served in the U.S. Army at Fort Bagby, N.C., also had law enforcement experience, Casas said.

"Both employees performed their security responsibilities in an exemplary manner. They were respected by their peers and company management. Both will be sorely missed," Casas said in the statement.

Both men's next of kin were notified of the deaths. Funeral services were pending.

Ex-POW says soldier isn't getting enough credit

CLEVELAND — Former prisoner of war Shoshana Johnson said a fellow soldier has not received enough credit for his actions when they were captured during an ambush in Iraq.

Johnson, who spent 22 days as a POW after she was shot in both ankles, says Pfc. Patrick Miller helped fend off their attackers for a short time after the skirmish started and did little things to keep morale up while they were being held in captivity.

"In my eyes, he is the true hero in this situation," Johnson said of Miller, who is from Park City, Kan. "I'm waiting for the day he gets his due."

Johnson, who spoke to about 100 people Thursday at John Carroll University, was captured after her convoy from the Army's 507th Maintenance Company was attacked in Nasiriyah in 2003.

"I don't think I'd be here right now if it wasn't for Miller," she said.

Cat adopted by soldiers finds home in Maine

BANGOR, Maine — An emaciated, toothless cat that was found in a Humvee tire by soldiers in Iraq has found a new home in Maine after being adopted and nursed to health by the National Guard troops.

The feral cat, named H.P., was spotted outside Abu Ghraib Prison near Baghdad last July by Spc. Jesse Cote and other soldiers from the 152nd Field Artillery Battalion.

Cote and his fellow soldiers paid for shots for H.P. and surgery it needed after getting into a fight with another cat. They also raised \$700 to fly H.P. — believed to be initials for "here, puss" — to an America in January.

Cote's family drove the well-traveled cat from their northern Maine home to Bangor in February so H.P. could be reunited with Jesse and other members of the 152nd.

From The Associated Press

Help for grieving families

VA offers counseling to those coping with life after loss of active-duty servicemember

BY SANDRA JONTZ
Stars and Stripes

For the first time, families of troops who die while on active duty can get grief counseling through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The VA's Office of Readjustment Counseling is counseling families at 206 community-based veterans centers throughout the States and in Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, said program analyst Greg Harms.

There are no veterans centers overseas and thus no face-to-face services for families there, but they can use the program if they are in the States. Also, they can receive phone-based services by calling (202) 725-9116, or e-mail services at vetcenter@hq.med.va.gov, he said.

"We're currently working on setting up an 800 number that won't be staffed 24 hours a day, but it could be at that cost. We wouldn't be able to do anything in person (for overseas families), but if they needed to talk to someone, we'd be able to put them in touch with somebody."

Services are limited to spouses, parents, grandparents, siblings and children of active-duty military, including activated guardsmen and reservists.

So far, 412 military family members of 276 servicemembers have sought counseling. Of those who died, most died during deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, but the service is not limited to deaths in a combat zone, Harms said. As of Wednesday, the number of U.S. troops killed in Iraq alone surpassed 1,500.

Combat-related death has the potential for creating complicated mourning, said Terry Martin, associate professor of psychology and thanatology at Hood College in Frederick, Md. For starters, such a death is both "sudden and, in fact, a preventable death," he said.

Added to grieving the loss of a loved one, families face changes from loss of housing or housing privileges to separation from friends, moving and changing schools, he said. In some cases, the deceased might have been the sole or most important source of income.

"To the best of all possible worlds, grief counseling would be immediately available, though most survivors go through an initial period of shock and usually cannot benefit from therapeutic intervention," Martin said. "I

would suggest that access to grief therapy be available at least for the first 12 months following the death."

The VA-based services are available the moment the family member seeks help, Harms said. There is no limit on the number of sessions a member can receive. "It's whatever is deemed clinically appropriate by the staff."

The VA has "blitzed" the information to all agencies that have contact with the families, Harms said.

And it has partnered with peer-mentoring services offered by the nonprofit Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, better known as TAPS, which offers grieving families and loved ones peer-to-peer support, but not the professional, clinical counseling services provided by the VA.

TAPS provides "one of the oldest forms of human coping and survival," said director Bonnie Carroll. "It's about connecting those who have been there and through it and can speak from the heart with those who need the support."

TAPS has about 250 members who met the criteria of being one year beyond their own loss and



DAVID CANTOR/Courtesy of the U.S. Army

Danny and Sandra Jordan observe a moment of silence at a ceremony at Veterans Memorial Park in Elba, Ala., for their son, Sgt. Jason Jordan, who was killed in Iraq in 2003. The Department of Veterans Affairs offers counseling to families grieving the loss of active-duty servicemembers. Services are available at community-based veterans centers in the States, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

have taken the program's basic training sessions to become peer mentors, Carroll said. Some of its members are overseas.

In its 14 years, TAPS has a database of about 10,000 people who received varying levels of services, provided in person, over the telephone and via e-mail, however the two parties agree to correspond, she said.

Also unlike the VA program, the services are available to anyone who knew the deceased servicemember, be it family, friend or significant other.

People can contact the organization 24 hours a day at 800-959-TAPS (800-959-8277); information is available on the Internet at www.taps.org.

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Story of Iraq war read between the milestones

BY TOM RAUM
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The conflict in Iraq can be told in numbers and milestones, from the more than 1,500 troops who now have died to the number of weapons of mass destruction found — zero.

Two American soldiers died in Baghdad of injuries from a roadside bomb and another was killed in Babil province south of Baghdad, the Thursday said, the military said on Thursday.

That brought to 1,502 the number of U.S. troops who have died since President Bush launched the invasion in March 2003, according to an AP count.

There are other milestones, other important numbers, some reached, some soon to be, as the conflict in Iraq nears its third year.

■ Roughly 60,000 National Guard and Reserve troops are deployed in Iraq. As of Wednesday, 300 had died there since the war began.

■ May 1 will be the second anniversary of Bush's "mission accomplished" aircraft carrier speech in which he announced an end to major combat operations.

■ The price tag is over \$300 billion and climbing, including \$81.9 million just requested from Congress. The money also covers op-

General optimistic U.S. casualties will decline

BY RUSS BYNUM
The Associated Press

FORT STEWART, Ga. — With U.S. deaths in Iraq topping 1,500, the commanding general of allied troops in Baghdad said he expects casualties will soon decline because of bomb-detecting technology and emboldened Iraqi informants.

"My expectation, not just a hope, is that over the coming months we'll see the number of casualties go down," Maj. Gen. William G. Webster said Thursday in a teleconference from Baghdad.

"Now, I'm knocking on wood at the same time, because the enemy gets a vote in this."

As commander of the Army's 3rd Infantry Division at Fort Stewart, Webster took command Sunday of Task Force Baghdad — the allied military force of 30,000 troops responsible for securing Iraq's capital city.

The greatest threat has been homemade bombs detonated from roadides, in cars and by suicide attackers. Webster said a main focus for his troops will be untangling and hunting down complex networks of insurgents — financiers, suppliers and attackers — behind the bombings.

operations in Afghanistan and the broader war on terror, but the bulk is for Iraq.

When Lawrence Lindsey, then chairman of Bush's National Economic Council, predicted in September 2002 that the cost of war with Iraq could range from \$100 billion to \$200 billion, the White House contradicted him and said

U.S. soldiers are also studying how insurgent bombs are built — using alarm clocks, washing-machine timers, cell phones and garage-door openers — to devise ways of finding the explosives before they kill.

"We're training our soldiers every night on what are the latest trends and techniques being used by the enemy so they can find these devices," Webster said. "We're finding 30 to 45 percent of them on a given day."

U.S. forces also have established hot lines where Iraqis can jam remote detonation signals or explode bombs harmlessly from a distance.

They're also beginning to use armored vehicles that can scan roads for potential bombs and inspect them with mechanical arms. Webster said the vehicles have discovered more than 60 insurgent bombs in the past month.

U.S. forces also have established hot lines where Iraqis can phone in anonymous tips about hidden bombs or plotting attackers.

Webster said the success of the Jan. 30 elections in Iraq has also emboldened many Iraqis who may have been previously wary of sharing information. "The confidence of the Iraqi people has increased and it has caused our tips to increase," he said.

the figure was far too high.

"Americans need to take note of these sorts of milestones because it's a way to show respect for the sacrifices of troops and reassess strategy," said Michael O'Hanlon, a foreign policy analyst with the Brookings Institution.

"But I'm much more interested

in trends," he added, citing indications pointing to the relative strength of the insurgency and whether violence is declining or increasing.

On that, the signs are mixed. The top U.S. general in the region said that about 3,500 insurgents took part in election day violence in Iraq on Jan. 30, citing es-

timates from field commanders. Army Gen. John P. Abizaid suggested the failure to prevent millions of Iraqis from voting showed the insurgency was losing potency.

"They threw their whole force at us, we think, and yet they were unable to disrupt the elections because people wanted to vote," Abizaid told the Senate Armed Services Committee this week.

But his comments came just a day after one of the biggest attacks by insurgents since the fall of Saddam Hussein's government in April 2003. A suicide car bombing in the town of Hillah killed at least 125 people, including dozens of recruits for Iraq's security forces.

Another milestone will come the day Iraq's security forces are sufficiently trained and equipped to deal with the insurgency — and to permit the United States to begin leaving.

There have been conflicting reports on this, too.

The administration says there are 140,000 "trained and equipped" Iraqi military, security and police officers.

But Sen. Carl Levin of Michigan, senior Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, said some administration documents suggest that there are no more than about 40,000 trained Iraq forces and that they are lightly equipped.

Units case colors for one-year Afghan tour

V Corps troops head to a new war zone after duty in Iraq

BY STEVE LIEWER
Stars and Stripes

GIEBELSTADT, Germany — After a too-short year at home in Germany, V Corps' aviation warriors are headed back to combat.

The units that will make up Task Force Griffin eased their colors in front of more than 200 spectators Thursday at Giebelstadt, wrapping up a year of unwinding from one war and preparing for the next.

Over the next few weeks, they will deploy to Afghanistan to lend air support to the Vicenza, Italy-based Southern European Task Force, which will lead the security mission there for the next year.

"We're returning to the fight. We're deploying to ensure the people of Afghanistan their peace and security," said Col. Mark McKearn, commander of the Giebelstadt-based 12th Aviation Brigade. "You are a battle-tested force, with the memories of Iraq fresh in your minds."

McKearn will lead an aviation task force that includes the

■ 12th Brigade headquarters staff.
■ 12th Brigade headquarters staff.
■ 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, a 12th Brigade UH-60 Black Hawk unit based in Giebelstadt.

■ Company F of the 159th Aviation Regiment, better known as "Big Windy," a CH-1 Chinook unit also from Giebelstadt.



■ 2nd Squadron, 6th Cavalry Regiment, an AH-64D Apache Longbow unit from Illesheim, Germany.

■ Companies A and B from the 7th Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment, a 3rd Corps Support Command maintenance unit from both Giebelstadt and Illesheim.

All of the units, and many of the soldiers in them, served in Iraq from early 2003 to early 2004 under Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, the V Corps commander, who attended Thursday's farewell.

"For most of you, this is not the first time you've answered the call to arms," Sanchez said. "I also see new faces, eager to prove their skills as warriors."



PHOTOS BY STEVE LIEWER/Stars and Stripes

Above: Col. Mark McKearn, left, 12th Aviation Brigade commander, and newly installed Command Sgt. Maj. Hector Marin fur the unit's flag Thursday at a ceremony in Giebelstadt, Germany. The 12th Brigade is leaving this month for a yearlong deployment to Afghanistan, just 12 months after returning from a one-year tour in Iraq.

Left: Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, V Corps commander, makes a farewell speech to soldiers and families from Task Force Griffin at a casing-of-the-colors ceremony.

Veterans of the previous Iraq tour say it's tough thinking about another yearlong separation from family.

"It's really hard. The current pace of deployment — it's too much," said Staff Sgt. Tim Holgado, 32, of the 7-159 Aviation. But, he added, "We're better equipped now than before. The families are more involved now. They know what's going on."

This time, the unit had almost eight months to prepare for a deployment to an established theater with a clearly defined mission and a set end date. That's quite different from last time, when the units deployed to makeshift bases for an indefinite

period they knew might include a hot war against a dangerous, unpredictable enemy.

"Last time, I was a new private. I was scared as hell, because the Saddam regime was still in power," said Spc. John Ritcher, 29, of the 3-158 Aviation. "I went straight out of [advanced individual training] into war."

"We know an awful lot more this time about how to get ready," said Capt. Lou Karnes, 30, commander of the 12th Brigade's headquarters company. "I can help my soldiers better, because I've been there before."

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U.S. military honors local nationals in Belgium

BY KEVIN DOUGHERTY
Stars and Stripes

As awards ceremonies go, this one struck a different tone.

Through the years, U.S. military commanders in Belgium and the rest of the Benelux have recognized local nationals for their contributions and achievements. But those largely were private affairs, with little or no fanfare.

On Wednesday, for the first time — at least as far as folks can recall — the guests of honor from Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg stood together to hear the Americans express their gratitude.

"That handshake meant as much as the plaque," said Belgian army Commandant Thierry Pirenne.

Pirenne, head of host nation support for the Belgian army, and others were surprised by the outpouring of appreciation, and by all the brass in attendance.

"I was just doing my job," Pirenne said.

Among the honored guests were Marine Lt. Gen. Edward Hanlon Jr. and Army Maj. Gen. Walter Wojdakowski. Hanlon is the U.S. military representative to the NATO Military Committee, while Wojdakowski is the acting deputy commander for U.S. Army Europe.

The honorees were an interesting mix, from a fireman and farmers to police and politicians as well as military personnel.

"As our storied history as allies defines



J.D. HARDESTY/Courtesy of the U.S. Army

From left, Army Maj. Gen. Walter Wojdakowski and Marine Lt. Gen. Edward Hanlon Jr. congratulate Lt. Col. Fernand Guth in uniform, Philippe Collart and Peter Arts at Daumerie Casern near Cheives Air Base in Belgium after presenting them letters of appreciation for their work in marking the 60th anniversary of World War II events during the past year.

our future vision," Hanlon told the gathering. "It is with rare opportunity we bring civic augmentees and friends from across the Benelux footprint together to honor their service as they focus on our continued safety, security and freedom."

The host of the event, held at Daumerie Casern, was Army Col. Dean A. Nowowiejski, commander of the 80th Area Support Group. The 16 honorees were lauded and given plaques for their efforts in one of two areas: contributions to force protec-

tion or support of 60th anniversary ceremonies for World War II events.

Luxembourg army Lt. Col. Fernand Guth, for example, was cited for his "outstanding support" in several commemorative events.

For a small country with 1,000 of its citizens in the armed forces, it's a big deal.

Belgian farmer Edouard Francois, on the other hand, received praise for his "attention to detail and genuine concern" for Americans. Francois tills the land next to Cheives Air Base, and for years has been alerting officials to security issues, from suspicious cars to holes in the perimeter fence.

As chief of the Schinnen Fire Department in the Netherlands, Jos Diederien and his 32-man team are responsible for the base where the 254th Base Support Battalion is headquartered.

While the workload at the base is light, his city volunteer department works with base officials on fire prevention and terrorism threats.

Diederien seemed surprised by the outpouring of appreciation.

"The American people like to tell you they appreciate what you are doing," he said. In Holland, "that isn't always the case."

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Marine Corps misses recruitment goals

New contracts miss target for second month in a row, but 'shipping' goals still met

By LISA BURGESS
Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — Like the Army Reserve, the Marine Corps missed a key recruiting goal for the second consecutive month in February — a concrete indication of the effect the war on terror is having on the all-volunteer force.

Marine recruiters were asked to deliver 2,964 new contracts in February, but were able to produce only 2,772, or 93.5 percent of the goal, according to Maj.

David Griesmer, a spokesman for the Corps' Recruiting Command at Quantico, Va.

January's contracting target was 3,270 recruits, but only 3,186 new Marines signed up, or 97 percent of the requirement.

The shortfalls mark the first time in 10 years the Corps has had problems getting enough youths to sign contracts pledging to serve within the next year, Griesmer said Thursday.

"Recruiting is harder this year," Gries-

mer said, citing the improved economy, the lure of college, and "concern of parents for their young adults."

Parents "see that the military's an active place right now, and they urge action," Griesmer said. "That's having an effect of slowing things down."

However, even with the two-month shortfall, Marine recruiters have met over 99 percent of their year-to-date contracting goal, signing 15,107 of the planned-for 15,232 recruits between Oct. 1 and Feb. 28, Griesmer said.

The Marines have set a goal of 38,195 contracts for fiscal 2005, which ends Sept. 30, Griesmer said.

Marine recruiters are also continuing to meet their "accessions," or "shipping" goal, which is the number of recruits who are actually sent to basic training each month, Griesmer said.

Griesmer said that the Corps recruiters consider their shipping achievements to be "the important, most accurate indicator of the recruiting effort."

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Sept. 11 hero honored at Fort Benning



Susan Rescorla sits in front of a portrait of her late husband, Rick Rescorla, on Thursday at the National Infantry Museum at Fort Benning, Ga. Rick Rescorla may be remembered forever as a hero who led hundreds of people to safety from the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001, but he will be immortalized at Fort Benning as a young soldier in Vietnam. A portrait of the former Army colonel was unveiled Thursday in a special ceremony honoring Rescorla, a decorated Vietnam veteran who died in the terrorist attack after helping evacuate 2,700 people from the World Trade Center.

Gen Jones: U.S., NATO troops not likely to be sent to Darfur

By JON R. ANDERSON
Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — The top commander of NATO and U.S. forces says it's unlikely alliance troops will be dispatched to the troubled Darfur region of Africa any time soon.

Marine Gen. James Jones told Stars and Stripes that although some key leaders have been pressing for action, no plans are in works to help in Darfur, where attacks by Arab militias against the region's non-Arab population has left an estimated 70,000 dead and more than 2 million displaced.

NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has been pushing for action by the alliance, Jones told Congressional leaders Monday, "but that hasn't resulted in any traction for the alliance to do something as an alliance."

Scheffer is "doing what he can to illuminate the problem and force discussions on it, but as of yet there's no consensus for any kind of NATO mission," Jones said.

New York's Democratic Sen. Hillary Rodham

Clinton said she worried that the alliance, which has been emphasizing closer ties with Africa under Jones, would lose credibility if not offer some kind of help in the crisis.

"This is going to be one of those situations where we all look back and say, 'How did we let it happen again?'" said Clinton, referring to Rwanda's 1994 sectarian killing spree that left hundreds of thousands dead while the international community did little to help.

"Our credibility is going to be very low if we can't even get them a transport plane or do something to help them with some visible means of support," said Clinton. "I just worry that all the good work you're trying to do in Africa will look like it's basically insubstantial."

"It is an horrific situation," said Jones, "but whatever is being done is going to have to be done on a bilateral basis... it's regrettable."

Jones told Stars and Stripes he was unaware of any plans for U.S.-only military mission into Darfur.

"I need political approval to do that, and I have not got that."

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NATO said to be considering use of troops in Israel-Palestinian conflict

By JON R. ANDERSON
Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — NATO peacekeepers in Israel? It could happen, says the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's top military leader.

Top-level NATO leaders are mulling the possibility of an alliance peacekeeping mission between Israel and the Palestinians should a peace deal get brokered, according to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe Marine Gen. James Jones.

"This is not a pie in the sky thing," Jones told Stars and Stripes in an exclusive interview Wednesday. "There are people who feel that if we can get a peace accord that's historical in nature, that you want to make sure that it works."

The idea has been broached repeatedly at high-level alliance gatherings in recent months, Jones said.

"I've been very surprised at how much discussion there's been informally. It's been raised in at least three or four forums that I've been involved in," said

Jones, including meetings with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during recent visits to Europe.

Although Jones declined to say which member nations were pushing the idea, he said, "These are serious countries."

Lesson learned

Jones says he's learned to pay attention to early discussions like this.

He said that when he took over the helm of U.S. European Command and NATO two years ago, there was a lot of talk of a NATO mission into Afghanistan.

"I didn't pay any attention to it," said Jones. He simply didn't think the proposals being floated would stand a chance at actual approval. Eight months later, the alliance began dispatching its first peacekeeping units to the war-ravaged country.

And that's certainly not the first stability mission NATO's been involved in. Tens of thousands of U.S.-led NATO troops have patrolled the Balkans over

the past 10 years in Bosnia (that operation formally ended in December) and the still-ongoing mission in Kosovo.

The U.S. has plenty of experience in Middle East peacekeeping as well with rotational battalions of light infantry keeping the peace between Israel and Egypt in the Sinai Peninsula since the 1979 Camp David accord.

Jones said it's too early to say which peacekeeping model — active "presence patrols" like in the Balkans or like the more static observation sites used in the Sinai — would be more appropriate in the Palestinian territories.

"Let's wait and see on this," said Jones. "There's a lot of work to be done. It will have its own character, and I'm not sure it will look like anything else, if we do it."

But as with the missions in Bosnia and the Sinai, Jones said he doesn't think NATO troops would go into the Middle East until a solid peace deal has been hammered out.

"I can't imagine anything happening before there's a recognizable peace declaration."

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IN THE STATES

Pilot sets nonstop solo flight record

BY JOHN MILBURN

The Associated Press

SALINA, Kansas — After covering 23,000 miles in 67 hours, Steve Fossett was ready for a bath, a good meal and a nap. First, though, he had some champagne to sip.

The millionaire adventurer on Thursday became the first person to fly around the world alone without stopping or refueling.

"Believe me, it's great to be back on the ground," Fossett said. "It's one of the hardest things I've ever done."

At times, it seemed Fossett would not achieve what he described as "my ambition." Problems with the jet's fuel system forced him to consider cutting his trip short.

But like the fictional Dorothy who needed help to get home from the land of Oz, Fossett relied on his engineering wizards to help him return safely to Kansas. Unsure of just how much fuel the adventurer had, the team followed a pink line plotting Fossett's progress.

They were pushing a lot of numbers back in mission control to make sure I had the fuel numbers to get at least to California," Fossett said Friday on NBC's "The Today Show." "Although I had a bailout back with a raft and everything, I didn't want to lose

the plane and it's very dangerous to jump into the ocean."

He completed his journey in the same place it started: this north central Kansas town of 46,000 people. Tens of thousands watched him land his custom-built GlobalFlyer at the airport.

Fossett, 60, had failed five times before successfully circumnavigating the globe solo in a balloon, but he needed just one try in a plane. He holds many other records as a balloonist, pilot and sailor.

The GlobalFlyer, designed by the same engineer of the Voyager aircraft that first completed the trip in 1986 with two pilots, could end up in the Smithsonian.

Immediately after landing Thursday, a jubilant Fossett hugged his wife, Peggy, and was congratulated by Sir Richard Branson, the Virgin Atlantic founder who financed the flight.

"It's been a magnificent trip," Branson said.

Fossett said he survived on 12 milkshakes and water during the flight. He said his main problems were headaches, which went away when he drank water, and a lack of sleep. Fossett used bottles as his bathroom.

He also had to stave off boredom, saying there wasn't much to look at in the air.



Virgin Atlantic founder Sir Richard Branson, right, sprays champagne on pilot Steve Fossett on Thursday at the Salina Regional Airport in Salina, Kan. Fossett had just touched down aboard the GlobalFlyer, becoming the first person to fly around the world solo without stopping or refueling. Branson financed the project.



Martha Stewart spends time with her horses at her home in Katonah, N.Y., on Friday. Stewart must spend the next five months in home confinement at her \$16 million New York estate here.

AP

'No place like home'

Martha Stewart returns to N.Y. after 5 months in jail

The Associated Press

KATONAH, N.Y. — Martha Stewart strolled outdoors with her dog and fed her horses Friday morning, hours after returning from prison to the multi-million-dollar estate where she will remain under the watch of federal authorities while trying to revive her homemaking empire.

Before her five-month stay in prison, Stewart lamented that she would miss her beloved pets and hoped to be free in time for her cherished spring gardening.

On a cold late-winter morning, she emerged from her home wearing a light-colored coat, dark pants and boots, but no gloves. Stewart walked with a companion and a red Cow to a snowy paddock. She handed treats over the fence to five horses and caressed

their muzzles, then turned to wave to journalists before heading inside again.

Stewart was driven to the 153-acre estate 40 miles north of midtown Manhattan after landing about 2 a.m. at Westchester County Airport in a private jet. She later was seen walking around inside her home with her daughter, Alexis.

For the next five months, Stewart must wear an electronic ankle so authorities can track every move. But she is allowed to receive her \$900,000 salary again and can leave home for up to 48 hours a week to work, shop or run other approved errands.

Her journey home began about 12:30 a.m. Friday, when two dark-windowed sport utility vehicles slipped away from the women's prison in Alderson, W.Va., and drove to a nearby airport.

There, Stewart smiled and waved to supporters as she walked across the runway and boarded the plane for New York.

"The experience of the last five months ... has been life altering and life affirming," Stewart said in a statement issued on her Web site.

Stewart, 63, who also has homes in Connecticut, Maine and the Hamptons, chose the Katonah estate, which she bought in 2000 for \$16 million, to be her prison until August.

Stewart prepares for two television shows in which she'll be starring: a revival of her daily homemaking show and her version of NBC's "The Apprentice."

"Right now, as you can imagine, I am thrilled to be returning to my more familiar life," Stewart said in the statement. "Certainly, there is no place like home."

Fans trek to W.Va. to give Stewart love

The Associated Press

ALDERSON, W.Va. — People really love Martha! Kathy Hermann underwent chemotherapy treatment in her hometown of Tacoma, Wash., on Wednesday, but it didn't stop her from flying across the country to see Martha Stewart as she left a federal prison in West Virginia early Friday.

"I'm tired, but it meant enough for me to come out here anyway," Hermann said. "It's all about support."

Hermann and several friends gathered at the Greenbrier Valley Airport in 16-degree weather holding a Martha Stewart-brand floral print sheet covered with signatures from Seattle-area fans. About 50 other fans joined them, many of whom screamed Stewart's name and waved as she boarded the plane.

Stewart was convicted last year in a Manhattan court of lying about a 2001 stock sale and was sentenced to serve five months at the federal women's camp in Alderson.

Hattie Hopkins, a former minister at the Alderson prison, said she was used to seeing high-profile inmates at the minimum-security facility, but "it wasn't as exciting as" Stewart's stay and departure.

But not everyone in the crowd was a fan. Some came to experience the moment itself.

"I came down just because it's history," said Lisa Huff of Bluefield, Va., about 65 miles away.

One of the tasks ahead of Stewart is spinning the goodwill she gained in prison into profits for her Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia Inc. Despite high stock prices, the company posted a loss last year.

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Sister caught Jackson

SANTA MARIA, Calif. — The teenage sister of Michael Jackson's accuser faced the singer for the first time since her family left his estate two years ago, testifying that his associates tried to control her family's whereabouts for a month and that she had caught Jackson serving alcohol to her brother.

The 18-year-old told jurors in Jackson's child molestation trial Thursday that in February 2003, the pop star suddenly had the family flown by private jet to a Miami resort, where he told them to not watch a documentary airing that night that featured him and members of the family. She also told the jury that on the flight back, Jackson shared a soda can with her brother and also gave him a watch and a jacket decorated with sparkles.

Prosecutors say the singer conspired to hold the family captive to make them help him with the documentary, and that Jackson gave the 13-year-old boy wine in the soda can and gave the gifts as bribes to keep quiet about it.

FBI offers reward

CHICAGO — The FBI announced a \$50,000 reward Friday for information leading to the identification of anyone involved in the slayings of a federal judge's husband and mother, saying it hoped the money could inspire help from criminals or others who might keep quiet otherwise.

No one has been declared a suspect in the slayings, and "we don't know at this time who did this murder," FBI Special Agent Robert Grant said in announcing the award.

He said investigators were looking at all angles, but white supremacists were one logical direction in which they were looking.

A white supremacist is scheduled to be sentenced next month for soliciting an FBI informant to kill Judge John Lefkow, who found the bodies of her husband and mother when she arrived home Monday.

8-year-old arrested

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — Police arrested an 8-year-old boy allegedly tied to a violent outburst in school, head-buttling his teacher and kicking an assistant principal, when he was told he didn't go outside to play with other students.

The 4-foot pupil was led to school by his father, an elementary school in handcuffs Tuesday and charged with disorderly conduct and assault and battery.

"It's not something that happens every day," Maj. Stan Stout said of what could be the department's youngest arrestee.

Stout said the chair-tossing, desk-turning outburst occurred after a teacher, and later the assistant principal, attempted to stop the boy from joining his classmates.

The child was later released to his parents.

From The Associated Press

Rather discusses Guard story fallout

Legendary news anchor retiring after 24 years

BY DAVID BAUDER
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — During a vaudeville appearance with David Letterman, Dan Rather pointedly ducked a question about whether CBS News President Andrew Heyward should have quit after last fall's discredited story about President Bush's military service.

About half of Rather's "Late Show" guest spot Thursday was spent talking about the story and the independent investigation into how it got on the air despite the use of documents CBS ultimately couldn't vouch for.

Rather, 73, will anchor his last "CBS Evening News" broadcast Wednesday, the 24th anniversary of when he took over from Walter Cronkite.

The story's producer was fired and three CBS News executives were asked to resign for their



"CBS Evening News" anchor Dan Rather, left, talks to host David Letterman on the set of "The Late Show with David Letterman" on Thursday. Rather, who retires March 9 after 24 years as an anchor, says he'll continue to be a correspondent and report for the network.

roles. Heyward kept his job after CBS Chairman Leslie Moonves concluded he had been failed by the people who worked for him.

Rather said the people who lost their jobs are "never far from my mind."

He paused when Letterman asked him whether the CBS News president should have "taken a bullet" and stepped down.

Chimps shot after attacking visitors

BY KIM CURTIS
The Associated Press

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. — A couple's plans for a birthday party for their former pet chimpanzees turned tragic when two other chimps at an animal sanctuary escaped from their cage and attacked. The man was critically injured with massive wounds to his face, body and limbs, and the attacking animals were shot dead.

St. James and LaDonna Davis were at the Animal Haven Ranch in Caliente to celebrate the birthday of Moe, a 39-year-old chimpanzee who was taken from their suburban Los Angeles home in 1999 after biting off part of a woman's finger.

Moe was not involved in the attack, said Steve Martarano, a spokesman for the California Department of Fish and Game.

The couple had brought Moe a cake and were standing outside his cage when Buddy and Ollie, two of four chimpanzees in the adjoining cage, attacked St. James Davis, Martarano said. Officials have not determined how the chimps got out of their enclosure, he said.

LaDonna Davis, 64, suffered a bite wound to the hand while trying to help her 62-year-old husband, Martarano said.

The son-in-law of the sanctuary's owner killed the attacking animals, Martarano said.



"He saw what was happening and had one kind of weapon with him and then got another he felt would be more substantial and shot them," Martarano said. "He pretty much saved a life."

St. James Davis had severe facial injuries and would require extensive surgery in an attempt to reach his nose, Dr. Maureen Martin of Kern Medical Center told KGET-TV of Bakersfield. His testicles and a foot also were severed, Kern County Sheriff's Coder Hal Chealandor told The Bakersfield Californian.

Davis was transported to Loma Linda University Medical Center, where he was undergoing surgery late Thursday, Martarano said.

Buddy, a 16-year-old male chimp, initiated the attack and after he was shot, Ollie, a 13-year-old male, grabbed the gravely injured man and dragged him down the road, authorities said.

"Everybody was trying to get the chimp off," Chealandor said.

Two other chimps, females named Susan and Bones, also escaped from the cage they shared with Ollie and Buddy, prompting sheriff's deputies, animal control workers, and Fish and Game officials to launch a search.

The wayward pair were recovered by Animal Haven owner Virginia Brauer after five hours.

"He's on vacation right now," Rather said, "but when he gets back you can ask him."

Before he became CBS News president, Heyward was Rather's executive producer at the "CBS Evening News."

Rather said that to his mind, two of the panel's most important conclusions were that it could not demonstrate that political bias played a part in the stories or con-

clusively account for the origins of the segments in question.

CBS's 8 story began falling apart when experts questioned the legitimacy of documents supposedly written by Bush's National Guard commander that suggested the future president had received preferential treatment.

"Although they had four months and millions of dollars, they could not demonstrate that the documents were not authentic, that they were forgeries," Rather said. He declined to give his opinion of Moonves' decision to oust the four employees.

"It's behind us," Rather said. "We have to look forward at some point. You know, you've had ups and downs in your career, you've had criticisms. Sometimes you think it's justified, sometimes not. But at a certain point you have to say, the panel has spoken, this is how it is."

Letterman warmly thanked Rather for several years of guest appearances. "If I'll help," he said, "I'll step down."

Rather laughed. "You're a prof-it center, Dave, don't step down," he replied.

Calif. trial in deaths of 9 children starts

BY JULIANA BARBASSA
The Associated Press

FRESNO, Calif. — A man charged with slaughtering nine of his children and stacking their bodies in his home went on trial, with prosecutors portraying him as a controlling figure who had sex with some of his daughters and beat the youngsters with baseball bats.

Marcus Wesson, 57, also demanded his children study the Bible for hours a day and force his daughters to wear dresses and cover their heads at all times, prosecutor Lisa Gamoi said in her opening statement.

Wesson could get the death penalty if convicted of murdering the children, ages 1 to 25. Gamoi said all but one were shot through the right eye with a .22-caliber handgun. The 1-year-old was shot in the left eye.

Wesson's attorney, Pete Jones, has argued in court papers that his client's daughter Sebbrenah shot the victims, then killed herself. He noted that Wesson did not have gunshot residue on his hands when he was arrested.

Gamoi told the jury that investigators found no identifiable prints on the gun and said there was no gunshot residue on the victims either.

Tests determined Sebbrenah's

DNA was on the weapon found beneath her body.

Outlining Wesson's secretive life, Gamoi described how his family grew from a relationship started with a woman 30 years ago.

At the age of 27, Wesson impregnated and married the woman, who had a 14-year-old daughter, she said.

Over the years, Wesson fathered several children, first with his wife, then with his own daughters and nieces, prosecutors alleged.

Wesson was the only one to emerge alive last March from the home bedroom of the modest one-story house after a tense, hours-long standoff with police.

Officers discovered the nine bodies in a bloody tangle and 10 white coffins stacked against the living room walls.

On the day of the killings, several family members had tried to retrieve their children from the Wesson household, Gamoi said. The conflict escalated, and they called the police for help, crying hysterically and saying that Wesson was a monster.

One of the women, 28-year-old Sofina Solario, was able to see her child briefly before she was shoved aside and Wesson retreated to the home.

"That's the last time she saw her son alive," Gamoi said.



Kiani Wesson, daughter of murder defendant Marcus Wesson, shields her face from the media as she walks to the courthouse in Fresno, Calif.

Victims of club fire 'didn't stand a chance'

Federal investigators release results of 2-year probe

BY BROOKE DONALD

The Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Sarah Mancini knew her son had probably died quickly in the 2003 nightclub fire that took 100 lives and injured scores more.

On Thursday, she learned just how fast the club became a deadly firetrap — and what could've been done to save more lives, including that of her 34-year-old son, Keith.

Releasing the results of their two-year probe, federal investigators found it took only 90 seconds for flames to race along the club's foam-laminate ceiling and walls, releasing thick smoke and creating temperatures about nine times hotter than needed to boil water. One inside the West Warwick club at that point could have survived, according to the report by the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

"They didn't stand a chance," Mancini said.

The institute said sprinklers would've allowed more people to get out of the club, and urged all nightclubs to install them.

The recommendation was one of 12 included in the report. The Feb. 20, 2003, fire at The Station started when sparks from a rock band's pyrotechnics ignited flammable foam used in the club as soundproofing. The blaze was the fourth deadliest nightclub fire in U.S. history.

NIST, which is part of the U.S. Commerce Department, recreated the conditions in the club to help officials understand how to improve building safety codes, standards and practices. The agency has no regulatory authority and does not assign blame, but believes if its recommendations are adopted, future tragedies may be prevented.

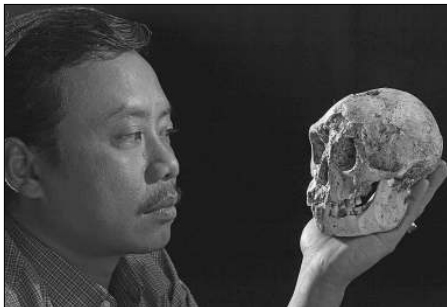
"We know this community has suffered a terrible tragedy," said Jim Hill, director of the Building and Fire Research Laboratory at the Gaithersburg, Md.-based institute. "We trust our work will be an important step to avoid such tragedies in other communities across the country."

Besides sprinklers, the institute said nightclubs should have to follow tighter rules on using flammable materials; improve exits, such as widening doorways; and have additional portable fire extinguishers. It also recommended improving fire inspection programs.

According to the report, sprinklers would have contained much of the blaze within 25 seconds and also kept the temperature in the club at around 77 degrees. During the fire, the temperature inside the club reached 1,800 degrees within 90 seconds.



Jim Hill, left, and William Grosshandler, both with the National Institute of Standards and Technology, answer questions about their report on The Station nightclub fire on Thursday in Providence, R.I.



Thomas Sutikna of the Indonesian Centre for Archaeology in Jakarta, Indonesia, holds a skull that he and fellow scientists believe represents a new human species, *Homo floresiensis*.

Scientists: 'Hobbit' fossil could reveal new species

The Associated Press

DENVER — Scientists working with powerful imaging computers say the spectacular "Hobbit" fossil recently discovered in Indonesia had distinctive brain features that could justify its classification as a separate — and tiny — human ancestor.

The new report, published Thursday in the online journal *Science Express*, seems to support the idea of a human dwarf species marooned for eons while modern man spread across the planet.

Detractors of the theory, however, said the computer models were unconvincing.

The new research produced a computer-generated model that compared surface impressions on the inside of the fossil skull with brain casts of modern and ancient humans, as well as chimps and other primates. The scientists said the model shows that the 3-foot specimen, nicknamed Hobbit, had a brain unlike anything they had

seen before in recent human lineage. The brain is chimp-like in size.

Despite being up to two-thirds smaller than a modern human brain, the Hobbit fossil's brain shared wrinkled surface features with the brains of both modern humans and *Homo erectus*, tool-making human ancestors that lived more than 1 million years ago, the researchers said. Some of those features are consistent with higher cognitive traits, they report.

At the same time, they said the Hobbit brain was different from the brain of a modern human pygmy or a human with abnormal brain growth.

"This is something new," said Florida State University anthropologist Dean Falk, who led the study. "This discovery has flummoxed the field of anthropology."

In October, scientists from Indonesia and Australia caused an international sensation with their report of a trove of fossils found in a cave on the equatorial island of Flores.

'Lost City' reveals undersea secrets

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A strange world of sea-through shrimp, crabs and other life forms teems around a newly explored field of thermal vents near the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, scientists report.

Towering white mineral chimneys mark the field, named the Lost City, a sharp contrast to the better-known black smoker vents that have been studied in recent years.

The discovery shows "how little we know about the ocean," lead researcher Deborah S. Kelley of the University of Washington said.

The Lost City was discovered by accident in 2000 as Kelley and others studied undersea areas near the mid-ocean ridge.

They returned to the area in 2003 to analyze what they had found and were startled to learn how different the new vent environment and its residents were from ones studied before.

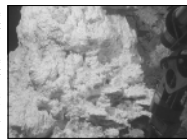
Their findings are reported in Friday's issue of the journal *Science*.

Black smokers are chimney-like structures that form when very hot water — reaching 700 degrees Fahrenheit — breaks through the ocean floor and comes into contact with frigid ocean water.

At Lost City, on the other hand, the temperature of the escaping fluid is 150 degrees to 170 degrees.

A variety of unusual creatures have been discovered around black smoker vents.

At first the scientists thought there were few animals in Lost City. Then they vacuumed the surface of the white vents and found large numbers of tiny shrimp and crabs, mostly transparent or translucent and less than a half-inch in size, that had been hiding in nautilus and crinoids, Kelley said. The total mass of life around the Lost City vents is less than that of the black smokers but there is just as much variety, Kelley said.



Science and the University of Washington via AP. The deep-sea submersible Alvin takes samples from the Lost City.

Dick Clark recuperating

MALIBU, Calif. — Three months after a stroke, Dick Clark continues to recuperate at his beachfront home and doctors are pleased with his progress, Clark's publicist said.

"He is continuing rehabilitation. He is walking and talking, not to the extent that we would like to see it, but he's progressing. The doctors are happy with his progress," Paul Sheffrin said.

Clark, 75, suffered a stroke Dec. 6 and was hospitalized for more than seven weeks at a Los Angeles hospital.

Pilot suspended after arrest

ATLANTA — Delta Air Lines said it has suspended a pilot who was arrested by German police who suspected he was drunk as he prepared for a flight.

The first officer, who Delta has declined to identify, was one of three pilots scheduled to make the Monday morning flight from Frankfurt to Atlanta.

The pilot was given a blood-alcohol test and faces possible charges of dangerous interference in air transport, according to news reports.

Teacher accused of assault

CHARLESTON, W. Va. — A 37-year-old middle school teacher has been charged with having sex with four children under age 16.

Police in central West Virginia filed eight charges of third-degree sexual assault against the woman, Toni Lynn Woods. A criminal complaint said she had confessed, but did not give genders or specific ages of the students.

Woods, who taught sixth grade at Braxton County Middle School, has resigned and surrendered her teaching certificate, according to county prosecutor William C. Martin.

Woods was charged by police Wednesday night and arraigned Thursday morning. She was being held on \$100,000 bail.

From The Associated Press

IN THE WORLD

Report: Countries fail in gender equality

BY EDITH M. LEDERER

The Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — Many women were worse off today than they were 10 years ago, women around the world say in a new report that accuses governments of failing to keep their pledge to achieve gender equality.

Governments worldwide have adopted a "piecemeal and incremental" approach to women's rights that cannot achieve the goals in the landmark platform of action adopted at a 1995 U.N. conference in Beijing, it says.

The report is the work of women's rights activists in 150 countries. Compiled by the Women's Environment and Development Organization, an international advocacy group based in New York, it was released Thursday to coincide with a high-level U.N. meeting on implementing the platform.

U.S. abandons amendments to declaration

The Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — Facing overwhelming opposition, the United States on Friday abandoned attempts to amend a declaration reaffirming the blueprint to achieve equality for women, saying it was satisfied the document did not guarantee the global right to abortion.

U.S. Ambassador Ellen Sauerbrey said the United States would now join other nations in approving the declaration endorsing the 150-page platform for action adopted at the 1995 U.N. women's conference in Beijing.

The message was clear, starting with the title: "Beijing Betrayed."

"The women of the world don't need any more words from their governments — they want action, they want resources and they want governments to protect and advance women's human rights," the report said.

The women's report sounded very different from the speeches this week at the U.N. conference, where governments have been touting their records on women's rights.

"The realities women document often contrast sharply with the officials' reports," June Zeitlin, the executive director of Women's Environment and Development, said.

conference in Beijing by consensus.

The U.S. attempt to amend the declaration had taken the spotlight at a two-week review of the Beijing platform which began Monday, angering many of the 130 governments and 6,000 representatives of women's and human rights organizations. They had hoped to focus on obstacles to women's equality in the economy, the family, education and political life — not on the abortion issue.

With the United States now in agreement, delegates were scheduled to adopt the declaration later Friday.

"Governments need to respond very strongly to counterbalance these trends and push the Beijing platform to further women's rights," Zeitlin said.

Nonetheless, she said, "there is still some cause for celebration."

Advocates of women's rights have stepped up their activities around the globe and have pressed governments to change some discriminatory laws. The number of countries that ratified the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women rose from 146 a decade ago to 179, though the United States has still not done so.

The goal of giving every girl and boy an elementary school education by 2005 is likely to be met everywhere but sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, the report said.

Gunmen clash with Palestinian police

BY ALI DARAGHMEH

The Associated Press

NABLUS, West Bank — Tensions between Palestinian Authority police and militant groups erupted into violence Friday as Palestinian gunmen opened fire at a police station, sparking a gunfight that left three people wounded.

It was the second serious clash between Palestinian authorities and armed groups this week, underscoring the delicate task that Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas faces as he tries to rein in militants and restore law and order in the West Bank.

Abbas has been trying to persuade armed men to lay down their weapons while resisting calls from Israel and the international community for a crackdown. Pressure has increased on the Palestinian leader to take tougher action since a Palestinian suicide bomber from the West Bank killed five Israelis in Tel Aviv last weekend.

The gunmen belonged to al Awda, a small militant group affiliated with Abbas' ruling Fatah party. Representatives of the group said they acted in response



Palestinian policemen shoot during clashes with Palestinian militants Friday in the Old City of the northern West Bank town of Nablus. Witnesses in Nablus said at least 13 gunmen took up positions outside the police station and began shooting, prompting police to return fire. Hospital officials said three people were wounded in the clash, one seriously.

to police attempts to arrest one of their members who was driving a stolen car. But a police spokesman said the group was upset that one of its members had been beaten while in police custody.

Witnesses said at least 13 gunmen took up positions outside the police station on Friday afternoon and began shooting, prompting

police to return fire. Hospital officials said three people were wounded in the clash, one seriously.

"I heard loud noises and gunfire," said Mohammed Zohel. "I thought the Israelis had gone into the police station, but later I saw it was gunmen fighting the police. It is a real war and very frightening."

Abbas tried to play down Friday's incident, saying Israel's continued presence in Palestinian population centers has hindered his ability to take action. Israel agreed at a Mideast summit last month to pull out of five West Bank towns, but the handover was frozen after last week's suicide bombing.

AIDS warning

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia — More than 80 million Africans may die from AIDS by 2025, the United Nations said in a report released Friday, warning this may create millions of orphans who could be easy recruits for rogue armies on a continent riven by wars.

HIV infections could soar to 90 million if more isn't done soon to fight the pandemic, the report said. UNAIDS estimate the number of AIDS orphans could grow from the current 11 million to 27 million by 2025 without greater action and funding.

MS drug recall

DUBLIN, Ireland — A second patient taking a recently suspended multiple sclerosis-fighting drug, Tysabri, has contracted a rare disease of the central nervous system, the Irish and American manufacturers who developed the highly touted medication confirmed Friday.

Eli Lilly and Co. of Indianapolis, Ind., and Biogen Idec Inc. of Cambridge, Massachusetts, had announced Monday that they were withdrawing Tysabri because one patient had died of progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy, a usually fatal disease, while a second patient was suspected of developing PML.

4 Mounties killed

TORONTO — Canadians were stunned Friday by the deadliest single attack on police officers in 120 years, after a gunman killed four Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers while they were investigating an illegal marijuana farm.

RCMP spokesman Cpl. Wayne Oakes said the four officers were found in a Quonset hut late Thursday.

From The Associated Press

Italian prosecutor looks into U.S. role in abduction

The Associated Press

ROME — An Italian prosecutor is investigating whether U.S. agents played a role in the alleged abduction from Milan of a suspected Islamic militant, according to news reports.

The 41-year-old imam, identified as Abu Omar, disappeared in the northern Italian city in February 2003. Milan Prosecutor Armando Spataro is looking at whether he was seized in a CIA

operation and flown to Egypt for interrogation, the Corriere della Sera and other newspapers have reported.

Last week, the prosecutor visited a joint U.S.-Italian air base in Aviano to find documents on air and vehicle traffic that might shed light on the disappearance, Corriere said.

Asked about the case, Spataro confirmed he had visited Aviano on Feb. 23 "with full cooperation" of the base commander but

denied launching a search there. He declined to discuss the reported investigation.

An official at the U.S. Embassy in Rome also confirmed Spataro's visit to the base in northern Italy. The official, who asked not to be named by name, said the embassy would "respond appropriately" to requests for information from Italian authorities.

Both Corriere and La Repubblica newspapers have reported that CIA agents were suspected of a

role in the capture of Egyptian-born Omar. The newspapers said Omar was released in spring 2004 but his whereabouts were now unclear.

Citing alleged wiretapped conversations, the newspaper reported that Omar called his wife in Milan after his release and recounted that he had been seized by Italian and American agents and taken to a secret prison in Egypt, where he was tortured with electric shocks.

Study: Prenatal care saves babies

By EMMA ROSS
The Associated Press

Poor countries can adopt cheap care to save thousands

LONDON — More than 10,000 newborn babies die every day in poor countries, and more than 7,000 of them could be saved by simple, cheap — and deliverable — care, according to research announced Thursday.

While global attention has focused on improving the health of mothers and children in the developing world, the fate of the newborn has fallen through the gap, according to analysis papers to be published in coming weeks in The Lancet medical journal.

Almost 40 percent — 4 million — of the annual 10 million deaths of children under age 5 occur in the first month of life. That's more than the number of people who die of AIDS each year, and experts say it's an "unconscious" statistic for the 21st century.

Nearly 1 million of those babies could be saved by such simple interventions as tetanus shots, breast-feeding and sanitary conditions during delivery, as well as basic hospital emergency services, such as Caesarean sections, according to the research.

"At less than \$1 per capita per year in additional spending to provide these lifesaving interventions to 90 percent of mothers and babies, the cost is affordable," said an investigator, Dr. Gary Darmstadt, director of the Center for International Neonatal Health at Johns Hopkins University.

"At less than \$1 per capita per year in additional spending to provide these lifesaving interventions ..., the cost is affordable."

Dr. Gary Darmstadt
study investigator

Success is possible without intensive care units stocked with incubators and ventilators. Many lives can be saved without hospital building programs or the overhead of health care systems, according to a panel of public health experts who did the analysis.

The main causes of newborn

death are premature birth, infection, diarrhea and suffocation. Tetanus and labor complications are also important causes.

Rich countries have newborn death rates of four per 1,000 live births on average. By contrast, the rate in poor countries, where 99 percent of all neonatal deaths occur, is 33 deaths per 1,000 live births. The highest rates are in Africa.

It's not high-tech care that has made the difference in rich countries. In England, newborn death rates fell from 30 per 1,000 live births in 1940 to 10 in 1975 after the introduction of free prenatal care, better care during labor and

the availability of antibiotics. And it's not only wealthy nations that have succeeded in reducing neonatal deaths. Countries such as Honduras, Indonesia, Moldova, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka and Vietnam have done it, despite being quite poor.

While it may take a decade to bolster hospital services in some of the poorest areas so that the target of saving 3 million babies a year can be reached, experts say much of the reduction in deaths can be achieved without fully developed health systems.

Community programs that offer basic services and educate families about safer home birth and baby care can go a long way and can be rolled out quickly and cheaply.

The research was produced by experts from several countries, as well as international agencies such as the World Health Organization and UNICEF. The project was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and USAID.

Russia kills 5 suspected of school seizure

The Associated Press

ROSTOV-ON-DON, Russia — Russian authorities have killed five people and arrested four others suspected of aiding the hostage-taking attack on a school in southern Russia last year that killed 330 people, prosecutors said Friday.

Deputy Prosecutor General Nikolai Shepel said in a statement that those arrested were suspected of helping stage the hostage-taking in Beslan where assailants held more than 1,000 hostages for nearly three days. The siege ended Sept. 3 in gunfire and explosions. Nearly half of the 330 victims were children.

Shepel said that five other suspects were killed while resisting arrest. The statement did not say when or where the raid took place.

The suspects were believed to be involved in the school raid "at the stage of its preparation," Shepel said.

Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev has claimed responsibility for the school seizure and other latest terror attacks in Russia's southern region.

Officials say 32 people took part in the attack that killed 31 of them and were killed and one detained.

Shepel said that the suspects arrested in the latest raid were also accused of involvement in an attack on police facilities in Russia's southern region. Ingusheta near Chechnya in June, in which about 90 people were killed.

He added that a suspected al-Qaida liaison in Chechnya, Abu Dzer, a Saudi Arabian national, who died in a Russian security sweep last month, was a key organizer of the school seizure and other terror attacks. President Vladimir Putin has responded to terror attacks by ending elections of regional governors and individual lawmakers, arguing that Russia needs to strengthen the federal government to avert terror attacks. He also has ordered the draft legislation tightening security and giving extra powers to law-enforcement agencies.



Rizal Shahputra, 20, stands outside his family's home at Banda Aceh, Indonesia, and surveys the damage. The tsunami survivor, who drifted for several days on a raft, made an emotional return to tsunami-shattered Aceh on Friday.

AP

Tsunami survivor back home

By YEHO EN-LAI
The Associated Press

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia — Swept out to sea by the tsunami, Rizal Shahputra drifted on a raft of uprooted trees for eight days, seeing hundreds of people slowly rise and slip beneath the waves before being rescued and taken to Malaysia.

On Friday, he returned home for the first time to confirmation of his worst fears — his mother, father and two of his three siblings were killed.

"I still feel my family by my side even though they are dead," Shahputra said after an emotional reunion with 10 surviving relatives in his home province of Aceh on Indonesia's Sumatra island.

"I'm 80 percent healthy, and 20 percent sad because everything I remember is no longer here," Shahputra said.

At the reunion, he prayed with his relatives and showed them a photo album containing newspaper clippings of his survival tale, which was widely reported after he was picked up on Jan. 3 by a Japanese-owned cargo ship.

Shahputra, who was brought home from Malaysia by the British Broadcasting Corp., said he intends to soon return to Malaysia, where he wants to study civil engineering.

The 20-year-old was cleaning a mosque Dec. 26 in his home village of Calang on Sumatra's west coast when the earthquake-spawned waves, 35 feet high, flooded in. He had no time to run to higher ground and was swept out in the backwash, along with an untold number of others.

More than 125,000 people have been confirmed killed in Indonesia, the hardest-hit of a dozen countries on the Indian Ocean's rim, with almost 100,000 more still missing more than two months later.

Shahputra managed to clutch onto trees — a gift from God, he said — and fashioned a makeshift raft. On his first day afloat, he could see hundreds of other people in the water, swimming or struggling to stay afloat on pieces of debris.

On the second day, he saw six women drown, unable to hold on to anything any longer.

As time went on, he saw fewer and fewer people.

Shahputra lived on rain water he managed to collect until he was rescued — barefoot, all over his body — and taken to a hospital near Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

"I kept fighting, keeping my spirits up to return to dry land," he said Friday.

Britain terror bill

LONDON — The British government's proposed new anti-terrorism law, which would allow police to detain suspects under house arrest without charge, may breach human rights legislation, a panel of lawmakers warned Friday.

Prime Minister Tony Blair's government says Britain faces the threat of a terrorist attack and wants the power to order sweepstakes controls on terror suspects.

The government is struggling to pass the Prevention of Terrorism Bill, which civil rights campaigners say would erode the fundamental right to a fair trial. Bowing to opposition party demands, the government has agreed it must seek the approval of a judge before placing a suspect under house arrest.

Massacre probe

BOGOTA, Colombia — A Colombian army unit blamed for a horror massacre has denied responsibility, and the United Nations called for a full investigation into who butchered eight civilians, including three young children.

The victims were hacked to pieces and buried on a farm in San Jose de Apartado, a village in Antioquia state near the border with Panama. A former mayor and a priest have blamed government troops for the Feb. 21 massacre.

The Colombian Army's 17th brigade, which has been accused of carrying out the massacre, blamed leftist rebels in a statement late Thursday, saying the insurgents have carried out similar killings in the region.

Ex-minister found dead

KIEV, Ukraine — Ukraine's former Interior Minister Yuriy Kravchenko was found dead Friday, hours before prosecutors were to question him about the killing of an investigative journalist five years ago, officials said.

President Viktor Yushchenko said Kravchenko's death could be linked to the investigation into the killing of Internet journalist Heorhiy Gongadze, who investigated corruption under then President Leonid Kuchma.

Interior Ministry spokeswoman Inna Kisel said Kravchenko's death appeared to be a suicide.

Royal wedding protest

SYDNEY, Australia — Two protesters opposed to British Prince Charles' upcoming marriage cried out "shame" and held up placards showing pictures of late Princess Diana on Friday as the crown prince mingled with hundreds of well-wishers in Sydney.

Charles was expected to notice the demonstration against his scheduled wedding to Camilla Parker Bowles, but ignored it. Charles was in Sydney during a five-day whirlwind tour of Australia that has been overshadowed by scrutiny of his plan to marry Parker Bowles.

From The Associated Press

Looking at the news

A weekly sampling of U.S. editorial cartoons



CHARLIE DANIEL/Scripts Howard



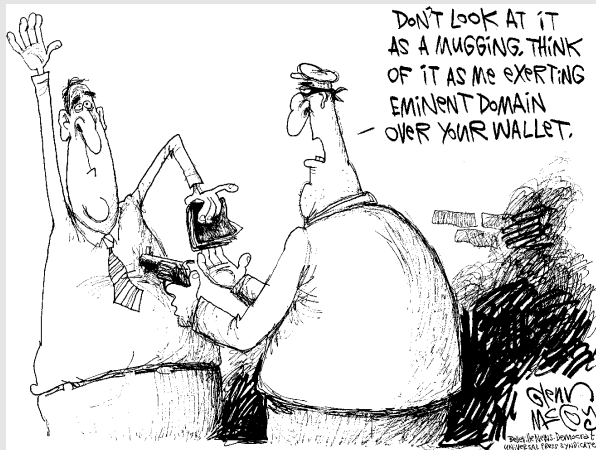
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CHARLIE DANIEL/Scripts Howard



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Lost trio returns

UT SALT LAKE CITY — Three eastern Utah men who disappeared in Texas, causing a multistate search, have returned home embarrased but safe. Len Boren, 22, Jason Long, 20, and Nathan Kas-mussen, 22, returned to Neola late Wednesday.

They had left Vernal on Sunday morning to travel to the Houston area to go to work for a petroleum company.

The three were following another man, Troy Harris, who was to be their boss at a job site in Houston, said Wally Hendricks, Duchesne County chief deputy sheriff.

They stopped at a truck stop in Bellevue, Texas, for food and gas about 1:30 a.m. Monday. That was the last Harris saw of the trio.

Kathy Hadlock, the grandmother of one of the men, said they had gotten lost and turned around near Lubbock, Texas, and headed back to Utah.

Ugly fish saved by law

AL MONTGOMERY — Fishermen often uttered obscenities and threw their catch back in the water after hooking the long, skinny, ugly fish known as a garfish. What they probably didn't know was that, according to Alabama law, they were supposed to suddenly become the garfish's executioner.

The Alabama House passed a bill Tuesday to repeal a 1943 law requiring fishermen who catch a garfish — also called "junk fish" or "trash fish" — to kill it rather than throw it back in the water to be caught again.

Rep. Jeff McLaughlin said he's not sure why lawmakers initially wanted to kill the garfish. But he said the bill he sponsored is part of his effort to highlight some of Alabama's archaic laws and outdated language in the state constitution.

Hypothermia death

PA WELLSBORO — A woman froze to death after wrecking her car and wandering away from the scene, authorities said.

Kathryn Maley, 41, of Wellsboro, was found dead about 3 p.m. Monday in a field approximately a mile from where her abandoned car was found crashed into a tree in Delmar Township on Saturday.

Tioga County Coroner Dr. James Wilson said that Maley appeared to have died from hypothermia, and that toxicology tests were pending.

There was no blood or other evidence that someone had been injured in the crashed car, so police did not initially look for an accident victim, Wilson said.

Vintage car scam

IN INDIANAPOLIS — A federal grand jury indicted an Indianapolis man on charges he auctioned vintage muscle cars that he did not own on the Internet site eBay, then had two partners rob would-be buyers at gunpoint when they came to pick up the autos.

Dewan A. Horne, 24, was being held Wednesday night in the Marion County Jail. His alleged accomplices were still at large, according to prosecutors.

In one of the robberies, which occurred in December and January,



AMERICAN ROUNDUP

a father and son from Georgia and South Carolina were forced at gunpoint to lie down while Horne and his partners took more than \$9,000 in cash and equipment from their truck before leaving in Horne's car, the indictment said.

Prescription discounts

OR SALEM — A new program designed to help Oregon's seniors save money on prescription drugs has begun mailing cards to those who signed up. Program officials say thousands more are eligible. The card allows seniors to purchase prescription drugs at negotiated discount prices from participating pharmacies.

Mystery of the oily birds

TX GALVESTON — More than a dozen pelicans turned up at a Galveston pier covered in oil, but baffled authorities said no spills were reported anywhere nearby.

Winston Denton, a regional biologist with the Coastal Fisheries Division of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department said some of the birds discovered Wednesday had oil covering most of their bodies but could still fly.

"It was a mixture of white and brown pelicans with varying degrees of oiling," Denton said. "The ones that have a significant

amount of oil on them are at risk of suffering from exposure to the weather," Denton said.

Investigators with the Texas General Land Office said Wednesday that they were unsure where the birds might have had contact with oil.

Tasteless skit

NJ CHESTERFIELD — Jersey prisons will undergo special training after a skit authorized as part of a drug treatment program for inmates featured a spoof on the Ku Klux Klan.

Five employees of the Chicago-based Gateway Foundation Inc., the company whose workers approved the skit, have been fired, and the company has been cautioned that further incidents won't be tolerated, said Matthew Schuman, a spokesman for the state Department of Corrections.

"The company was told this better not happen again," he said.

Several inmates who took part in the Jan. 6 skit at the Garden State Youth Correctional Facility in Burlington County were disciplined, although Schuman would not say what that entailed.

Stranded dolphins

FL MARATHON — Some 49 dolphins stranded themselves Wednesday off the Florida Keys and more than 20 were in a nearby canal or boat channel, officials said.

The rough-tooth dolphins were on flats and sand bars about a quarter of a mile off Marathon, said Laura Engleby, a biologist with the National Marine Fisheries Service. They were in about 6 inches of water at low tide, she said.

Marine mammals may strand when they are sick, injured or disoriented, she noted. "Right now, the stranding network is busy stabilizing all the dolphins," Engleby said.

Insurance premiums up

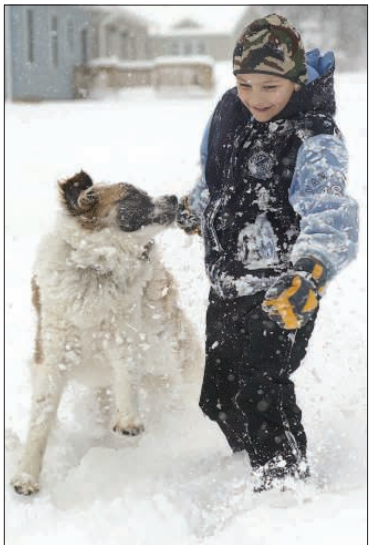
MI DETROIT — Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan will increase its insurance premiums for group medical coverage by an average of 7 percent to 9 percent this year, officials said. Individual policy holders will face a nearly 15 percent average increase. Blue Cross says it will raise premiums to meet rising medical costs. It plans to cut its reserves by \$100 million.

Immigrant rights debate

UT SALT LAKE CITY — Immigrant rights activists are angry about a bill requiring undocumented workers to hand over their driver licenses for driving "privilege" cards. One even compared the legislation to the marking of Jews during the Holocaust.

The card, according to the bill passed Wednesday by the Legislature, could not be used as identification to board a plane, open a bank account or obtain a driver's license in another state.

It would have to be renewed annually and would be a different color than Utah's regular blue driver's license and be printed with the words "FOR DRIVING PRIVILEGES ONLY — NOT VALID FOR IDENTIFICATION."



Snow play

Krishan Chopra, 7, runs with his dog Jackie, in the front yard of their home in Oneonta, N.Y.



Where's the candy?

Tereso Bautista takes a swing at a piata as the De Pere High School Spanish II class hosts a bilingual kindergarten class from Nicolet Elementary School in Green Bay, Wis.



Look what I found!

Savannah Soto, 3, plays with big red ball during a visit to Recreation Park in Visalia, Calif., with her family.



Early blossoms

As crocuses pop open on the south side of his Kalispell, Mont., home, Beau Fraleigh, 8, takes a photo of the early bloomers.



He shoots ...

Teacher Daniel Aguilar, 24, works on his basketball shot at the Kids World after-school program of the Baptist Child Development Center in Las Cruces, N.M.



Reaching to the sky

The flower stalk of an agave plant reaches skyward in Alamogordo, N.M. The stalk, which contains flowers and seed pods, can reach a height of more than 20 feet.



Windy winter drive

High winds produce blowing and drifting snow in Palmyra, N.Y., making driving treacherous on some roads.

High-tech trash can

NY NEW YORK — The city is testing a high-tech trash can that uses solar power to sense when it is full and then automatically compact the garbage inside.

The BigBelly can's tryout began Feb. 14 in Chinatown and then was moved to Tribeca on Feb. 28, city sanitation department spokeswoman Taryn Duckett said Wednesday.

Duckett said it's too early to tell whether it functions as advertised. The city decided to try out BigBelly because the manufacturer, Westborough, Mass.-based Seahorse Power Co. Inc., offered it.

Failed smuggling attempt

NM COLUMBUS — A stolen sport utility vehicle with 13 people inside — allegedly involved in a smuggling attempt — rolled over near the U.S.-Mexican border while trying to avoid police, authorities said. Four people were killed and nine were injured.

A Border Patrol agent spotted the SUV parked along a highway Wednesday afternoon, pulled behind it and turned on his emergency lights, according to Mosier.

"Border Patrol agents south of the location attempted to deploy tire deflation devices and the vehicle swerved to avoid the devices and lost control and flipped several times," said Doug Mosier, a spokesman for the U.S. Border Patrol in nearby El Paso, Texas.

High-class burglars

CA LOS ANGELES — Police have beefed up patrols in tony neighborhoods like Bel-Air and Brentwood in response to a rash of burglaries over the last year that has residents on edge.

Police said nearly 250 homes were broken into on the city's affluent west side last year, well above the average. Some residents have reported losses of up to \$500,000 and hundreds have attended community meetings to discuss the thefts.

Police have added veteran investigators to a burglary task force and officers are analyzing images captured by video cameras at two entrances to Bel-Air.

Two arrests have been made and police have recovered some loot, including dozens of rings, watches, coins and a pair of cufflinks in the shape of Bob Hope's profile.

Paddling violation

OH WARREN — A former township police chief convicted of paddling teenage boys for minor traffic violations received a nine-month suspended sentence. James Martin, 52, was convicted last month of 18 misdemeanor charges in which he paddled boys as part of an unsanctioned diversion program in Fowler Township. Parents approved the paddling.

'Beaten up' faculty

CO BOULDER — University of Colorado professors, even those who have nothing to do with Ward Churchill, say they're feeling "beaten up."

The lightning-rod professor ignited controversy with an essay on the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. He's

also under fire for allegations of academic fraud and taking a shortcut to tenure.

Calls by lawmakers for his dismissal and an examination of tenure have other faculty members saying their own freedom of speech — and their reputations — are threatened.

"It's tarnishing everyone else's image," said education professor Margaret LeCompte, who is running a full-page ad in today's Boulder Daily Camera newspaper supporting academic freedom.

Preventing fraud

WV CHARLESTON — The state Division of Motor Vehicles is rolling out a high-tech driver's license later this year in an attempt to reduce fraud. The new license will include fingerprint images, face-recognition technology and other security features.

Commissioner Doug Stump says all 21 DMV regional offices should have the new technology by October.

Former professor jailed

PA PHILADELPHIA — A former University of Pennsylvania professor and noted researcher in brain injury was sentenced to house arrest Wednesday for drugging a woman, then having sex with her against her will.

Prosecutors had sought a prison term of at least five years for Tracy McIntosh, former head of the university's Head Injury Center.

He pleaded no contest to sexual assault and drug charges late last year. Afterward, the university asked for his resignation.

Judge Raymond Means sentenced McIntosh to 1½ to 2½ months, and said he may serve his time under house arrest.

Mom gives up kids

TX HOUSTON — A baby left at a Houston fire station will be placed with her aunt if the home is determined suitable, a judge has determined.

The mother of the baby, who said in court Wednesday that she felt out of options when she gave up her 1-month old daughter a day earlier, also agreed to place her 6- and 7-year-old children with her sister.

Meanwhile, the mother of the children will undergo a psychological evaluation.

"I just felt stressed trying to do everything by myself," the woman said during an emergency hearing to determine placement of the baby.

BB gun leads to shooting

FL JENSEN BEACH — A sheriff's deputy shot a man twice after the man allegedly pointed a BB gun at the deputy several times, saying he "did not want to go back to prison."

Deputy Angelo Minella, a veteran with more than 10 years of service, fired five rounds from a pistol at Kenneth Serge Nelson Herbert, 43, hitting him twice, said Sgt. Jennell Atlas, sheriff's spokeswoman.

Herbert sustained injuries that did not appear to be life-threatening, Atlas said.

Photos and stories from wire services

The movie has a star-studded cast and is based on an award-winning book. But everyone signed on...

Because of Dave Matthews

BY MIKE SZYMANSKI
Zap2it.com

The cast of "Because of Winn-Dixie" includes an 80-year-old Oscar winner (Eva Marie Saint for "On the Waterfront"), an Oscar nominee (Cicely Tyson for "Sounder"), a multiple Golden Globe nominee (Jeff Daniels) and an up-and-coming 11-year-old starlet who's going to be in "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" (AnnaSophia Robb). As diverse as they all seem, the actors all really got them all together.

Although it's directed by well-respected Wayne Wang, and although the book it's based on won the Newberry Honor and is on The New York Times bestseller list, it's the chance to co-star in the first major movie with the frontman of the Dave Matthews Band that really got them all together.

"My mom and dad listen to him all the time," says AnnaSophia, who plays a girl who adopts a dog and names it after the store she found it in. "Oh sure, I know who he is."

"Winn-Dixie" he extraordinary," says Tyson, who plays a wild-haired hermit in the film. "I didn't know it was his first time acting in a big role like this. He's so talented."

And Saint says, "I didn't know about him, when I said, 'Sounder.' So I was a body by the name of Dave Matthews is in it, and my 14-year-old grandson played me all his music. He gave me the lyrics, because those lyrics are not that clear with any rock — is he rock? — well, I read the lyrics and he's such a poet. He did so much with that little role."

Dressed in a blue shirt and dark suit, and sporting a trimmed goatee and looking a lot less scruffy than he does in the film, Matthews tells Zap2it.com he has held out for years before committing to a major movie. He did a small part in "Where the Red Fern Grows" and wrote songs for "21 Grams," "Mr. Deeds" and "Matrix Reloaded," but never played as large a role as this on-set pet shop owner who befriends a girl and her dog.

"I've been reading scripts for years and years, and this felt right," says Matthews, who



Dave Matthews takes on his first acting role in "Because of Winn-Dixie."

LA Times

first vowed he'd never play a musician in a movie.

"But the role was written for a musician. Wayne [Wang] thought that I would be good for the part. I'm not sure why, but one thing would be that I could play the guitar. And at the time that he met me, I was unshaven. So those are two things that I had."

The film was ensemble enough so that he didn't have to carry the picture, and the story had a lot of heart, so if his music colleagues criticized him he could just say, "So what?" At least he didn't have to play a musician.

"That would be nauseating," he says with a smirk. "How sickening would that be?"

While filming, Matthews was working on music for a new band album, which he's now completing.

"I think the overall IQ of our records is gonna go up ever so slowly," he quips about his latest work, which is being arranged by Eminem's producer, Mark

Batson.

One of the songs he was kicking around is the "Butterfly" song, which he plays for AnnaSophia. He didn't want any of his public style to come through, so he ad-libbed this new ditty.

"It would just make the whole movie go, (makes plop noise), and come to a grinding halt right there," Matthews says, if any of his popular songs or style were easily recognized. "So I tried really hard to make it seem like it was inspired by insecurity, or nervousness,

that he started singing this song that he obviously had written for this little girl. For him, he sort of exposed — wrong word — divulged himself to her."

Matthews laughs, and adds that being a dad of 2-year-old twins also helped inspire the tender song. He says he particularly enjoyed working with father-of-three Jeff Daniels, who plays a preacher and AnnaSophia's father in the film.

Daniels, who's known for bringing a guitar to the set, says, "I've always been a huge fan of his music, but I never wanted to impose on him and ask for a jam session or ask him how to do this or that with music."

But Matthews asked Daniels for advice about acting, and Daniels says, "I told him to just play it like yourself, but instead of a guy who sells out Central Park in his 20s playing in a successful band, he goes to jail."

Matthews gets one of the biggest laughs of the film, with a simple line about bringing pickles to a party. He explains that he was waiting, while swatting mosquitoes, for a long time to perform his line and so when it was his turn, he exploded. He says, "It was just sort of all I had in me: 'I brought pickles!'"

Another challenge was working with a baby pig, a goose, a few cats and dogs, and a parrot that stood on his shoulder.

"The bird and I really kind of got into a whole weird thing; it got a little creepy," Matthews smiles wryly. "It would pull the hair on my beard, and it would go into my ears. It had this little black tongue, it was grooming me, it was awesome."

Someone suggests the bird was looking for parasites.

"He probably found some, too," Matthews says.

Lohan takes on her dad

Lindsay Lohan says her father has no right to claim a share of her earnings.

"He didn't do anything for my career except go out and not come home at night," the 18-year-old actress/singer tells W magazine in its April issue. "So I don't think he deserves anything. He doesn't even deserve my respect."

Michael Lohan's estranged wife, Dina, filed divorce papers in January.

Michael Lohan responded by saying he wants half of the 15 percent his daughter allegedly gives her mother — a figure that could be \$7 million a year, his lawyer has said.

He has also said he wants to do a reality TV show that would follow the family through the course of the divorce.

"As sick as it sounds, a reality show might help, actually," Lohan told the magazine. "At least then people could get the truth."



Lohan

Nelly not welcome

Ministers from 20 churches have banded together to protest Nelly's upcoming performance at Arkansas State University.

"When we started seeing some of the vile and filthy lyrics ... we thought we should get involved," said the Rev. Adrian Rodgers, of the Fullness of Joy Church.

"Jonesboro is a wonderful city because of what does not come here."

Rodgers said he was concerned about lyrics that include references to drugs, sex and violence and songs that Rodgers says are demeaning to women. He and the other pastors urged area residents not to buy tickets to the March 12 concert because they are worried that bringing such acts to Jonesboro would lead to problems.

Smits for president

It's Jimmy Smits over Alan Alda's landslide.

Polster John Zogby, who often asks Americans who they think will be elected president, surveyed viewers of "The West Wing" asking which candidate they prefer for the NBC political drama's next president — Democratic Rep. Matt Santos of Texas, played by Smits, or Republican Sen. Arnold Vinick of California, played by Alda.

The second term of Democratic incumbent President Josiah Bartlet, played by Martin Sheen, is coming to an end on the show.

Smits' character leads Alda's character 44 percent to 28 percent among "West Wing" viewers contacted by computer for the interactive poll.

Stories and photos from wire services

Horoscope

A new cycle for communication has started with Mercury entering Aries. This transit usually accompanies big, global, personal or both. The moon in Capricorn brings focus to traditional roles, but we'll be reinterpreting how we play them over the weekend. Be open to expressing yourself in a way you've never tried before.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (March 5). Your commitment to self-improvement makes this a banner year. Keep exploring zany ideas through the spring — your love life will benefit from the creative infusion. A persistent problem is solved in May. Frances can be better applied somewhere else that's relevant. Your best signs for love are Capricorn and Leo. You could marry in August.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). Calm, cool and collected gets things done. In order to make time your supporter instead of your enemy, recognize that shift with your state of consciousness — and you're the one in control of your state of consciousness.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). Nobody gives you power — you just take it. The initiative you show, especially socially and personally, makes you so attractive that wherever you go now, you'll have admirers.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). Lack of enthusiasm from the rest of the world has deflated your attitude somewhat. Do what it takes to put the "Wow" back in your life. Don't stop until you've got raving fans. An Aries will be among them.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). Outreach is key. The more you initiate, the less you enjoy. So even if you're not in the mood, kick yourself out of the house. Make sure your social swirl includes people with intriguing backgrounds and extraordinary taste.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). You're on a mission, and nothing will get in the way of your mission. And you're no lieutenant commander, either —

you're an admiral on the great seas of life. Believe in your enormous power.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). The curtain is rising, and you're still scrambling to assemble the set for your second act. You're caught

creating the illusion of your life. People are fascinated by the behind-the-scenes version of you and could fall in love.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Reacting to outer chaos is draining and unnecessary. Stop yourself from feeling the victim — you're so not the victim. Get centered, and dwell on this belief instead: You have enough of everything you need to succeed.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Self-control is the main issue, as there is now a specific outcome you cannot achieve given your current habits. Know your enemy, even when it appears in a socially acceptable and cleverly disguised form.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You've got a case of compare-and-contrast-itis. Your soul's expression is unique and cannot happen through anyone else. So stop measuring and judging, and start expressing what's inimitably you.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). There is no "dirty work," just work that you are more or less suited for. You get a sense of accomplishment from doing the very job someone else hates, and someone else is thrilled to take that nagging task off of your list.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). You'll experience a magical synchronization with your fellow man. Like Chinese people practicing tai chi by the Whanggong River, no one is in charge, and yet everyone seems to be moving together perfectly.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). Intellectually, you know the value of proper rest, but your busy mind won't stop chattering long enough to let you really relax. Seek external assistance in the form of guided meditation or a really boring television program.

Creators Syndicate

Holiday Mathis



Calvin and Hobbes



Jump Start



Zits



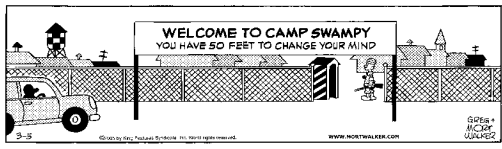
Cathy



Hi and Lois



Beetle Bailey



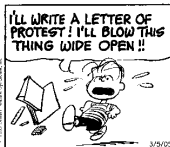
Red Rover



Better or Worse



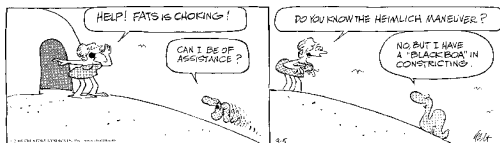
Peanuts



Fotrot



B.C.



Baby Blues



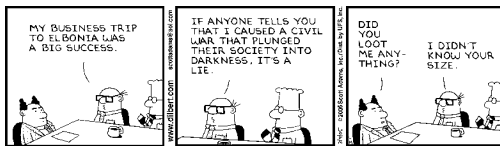
Spider Man



Blondie



Dilbert



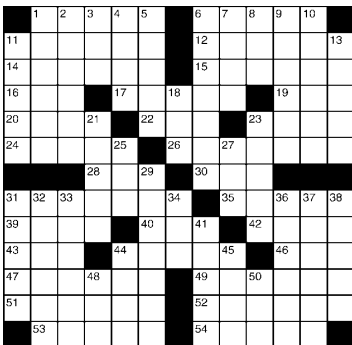
Hagar



Garfield



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



Across

- 1 Surround
6 Superhero garb
11 Whopper component
12 Reunion group
14 "Nighthawks" painter
15 Corn cooker
16 Spoonbender
17 Degas
19 Afternoon social
20 Robin Williams role
22 "Le Coq" —
23 ilk
24 Wheat bundle
26 Self-reproach
28 Trinity member
30 Mom's guy
31 Bundt, for one
35 Watergate evidence
39 Bread spread
40 Heavy weight
42 Unaltered
43 Census statistic
44 Praise
46 Biz deg.
47 Red metal
49 One-upmanship winner
51 Theatrical company
- 52 Guiding principles
53 Capital of County Clare, Ireland
54 Learns about sight
- 21 Leisuredly stroll
23 Pops
25 Dandy
27 A welcome
29 Characters
31 Work together
32 "Earth in the Balance" author
33 Persist
34 Affirmative action?
36 Mollycoddle
37 Sticks in
38 Kmart merger partner
41 Degree, to
44 Military cap
45 Aching
48 Bit of wordplay
50 Shell-game need

Down

- 1 "Yay!"
2 Dark-red apple variety
3 Chart
4 Thing
5 Our airspace defenders
6 Frolicked
7 Greatly
8 Litter member
9 Buyer
10 Villain's faces
11 Hoodlums
13 Really mad
18 Neither mate

Answer to Previous Puzzle



3-5 CRYPTOQUIP

KU RIRVPJMNP YRVR GM
QFKA F JEABZ MU YRKQZG.
YMEXN GZFG JVKAQ ED

FXX BXMDRV GMQRGZRV?
Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF YOU LIKED TO WEAR GOLD TIARAS, I GUESS PEOPLE WOULD REFER TO YOU AS "KARAT TOP."

Today's Cryptquip Clue: Y equals W

Pregnant 13-year-old needs help

Dear Abby: My best friend, "Mara," is 13. She's pregnant and refuses to tell her parents because she says they will go crazy. I keep telling her that telling her parents is what she should do, but she just won't listen.

Mara told me she's going to run away and has asked me to go with her. I would, because she's my best friend, but then I think she should stay because she's having a baby, and if that baby doesn't get enough food and stuff it could be harmed. I'm very confused. What should I do?

— **Confused Little Girl**
In Ohio



Dear Abby

Dear Confused: Running away is no solution. If ever there was a time a child needed her parents, this is one of them. Mara's parents may be disappointed, but they will NOT "go crazy." Use your friend again to tell her parents, and volunteer to be with her when she does. (An

alternative would be to tell your mother, and ask your mother to accompany Mara when she gives the news.) P.S. You are a caring friend with a good head on your shoulders. I hope Mara calms down and listens to you, because you're absolutely correct that medical care during pregnancy can be vital in delivering a healthy baby.

Dear Abby: I have been divorced 15 years. Recently my daughter, "Janelle," gave birth to a beautiful baby girl—I'm first grandchild. I have put up with a lot from my ex's family over the years, but did it to keep the door open for my children's sake.

Janelle is staying with me these first few weeks of her baby's life, so I told my ex and his family they were welcome to come over any time.

Janelle and I were looking at an old family album that con-

tained her baby pictures and left it out on the coffee table. That night, I went out for about an hour while my ex-mother-in-law, sister-in-law and niece came to visit.

When I returned I asked if they had seen the album—and they said they had. The next morning, I was leaving through the album again, and I am missing six pictures! It had to be them because the album was full the day before. What should I do?

— **Disgusted in Arizona**
Dear Disgusted: Call the "ladies" and ask if, perhaps, they "inadvertently" picked up some of your daughter's baby pictures. Ask that they be returned and volunteer to have copies made for them. If they won't own up to taking them, then pray you can locate the negatives. And in the future do not invite them to your home.

Letters for this column—with your name and phone number—should be addressed to Dear Abby, P.O. Box 6940, Los Angeles CA 90069. Readers can write to Abby on the Internet at <http://www.uxpress.com/dearabby>. Universal Press Syndicate

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

RYSAC

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RYBIN

PERUPA

SHARTH

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Answer: A

Jumbles: POACH AFTER JUSTLY BELOW

Yesterday's Answer: What the trainer gave the greyhound during his morning workout — A FEW "LAPS"

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

by Henri Arnold and Mike Argiron



WHEN THE ROBBER WAS CAUGHT ON THE STEPS, THE COPS SAID IT WAS—

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Jumbles: POACH AFTER JUSTLY BELOW

Yesterday's Answer: What the trainer gave the greyhound during his morning workout — A FEW "LAPS"

Too much information too often

Dear Annie: A woman I used to work with is getting on my nerves.

"Tallie" and I would take our coffee breaks together. She is legally blind, and I would help her get her beverage and water for her service dog. That's it.

When I left my job, Tallie wanted to keep in touch, so we exchanged phone numbers. I thought it would be nice to hear from her occasionally, and for a while, it was fine. That all changed when Tallie, a newlywed, found out she was pregnant.

Tallie is becoming overly attached to me. She goes to the hospital every week, complaining about some ache or pain, dehydration, lost weight etc., and then calls me afterward to describe the examination in great detail. I don't want to hear these graphic recitals and suggested she discuss such private matters with her husband, but she won't stop. I know she is crying out for

Annie's Mailbox



attention, but I am not a trained medical person. She has a husband and close family members to take care of her.

Last night, Tallie did it again, and I told her flat-out that I find hearing such personal information offensive. She replied, "I'm only trying to keep my best friend updated. You never ask how I'm doing." I don't want to be Tallie's best friend. She was simply a co-worker, and I've discovered I don't particularly like her. I can't change my phone number, since it belongs to a relative and I don't pay the bill.

How can I nicely avoid her?

— **Non-Friend**
Dear Non-Friend: You need to extricate yourself from being held hostage by this emotionally needy woman. Look into the cost of adding your own phone line with a separate number. Otherwise, when Tallie calls, say "Sorry, but I have to run. Bye." Then hang up immediately. After

a dozen "conversations" like that, she will move on to a more sympathetic listener.

Dear Annie: I'd like to say "right on" to the letter from "Redding, Calif.," who said stores should provide seating for those who have trouble walking. For the last two years, I have been plagued with chronic fatigue and peripheral neuropathy (an extremely painful nerve disorder of the feet). I have asked the managers in my favorite department stores to provide seating, to no avail.

How much could it possibly cost to throw a few folding chairs out on each floor? I'm considering giving my money to the TV shopping networks instead.

— **Kara in California**
Dear Kara: This is another reason why shopping online is so popular.

Annie's Mailbox is written by Kathy Mitchell and Marcy Sugar, longtime editors of the Ann Landers column. Please e-mail your questions to anniesmailbox@comcast.net, or write to: Annie's Mailbox, c/o Creators Syndicate, 5777 W. Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045. Creators Syndicate

Family Circus



"If you sneeze when you're alone, should you 'God bless' yourself?"



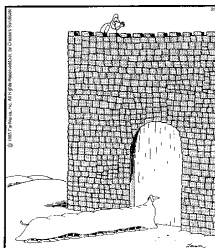
Domis the Menace



© Gary Larson

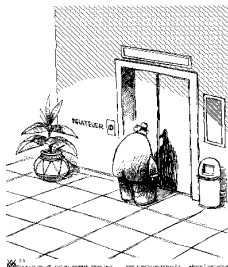
The Far Side

"I LEFT SOME SHAMPOO IN MY HAIR SO IT'LL STAY CLEAN A LOT LONGER."



"Open the gate! It's a big wiener dog!"

Non Sequitur



Suns snap Pistons' 8-game streak

The Associated Press

PHOENIX — The Detroit Pistons' romp through the West came to an end in Arizona. The Phoenix Suns, showing a rugged side they rarely display, rallied from 10 points down behind the clutch play of Steve Nash and Amaré Stoudemire to snap the Pistons' eight-game winning streak 100-97 on Thursday night.

"We won because we finally got tough," Nash said. "We gave up so many offensive rebounds, lost so many loose balls. Mentally, I don't think we were tough enough. But once we saw a little opportunity and hope, we got tough. It's too bad it took that long to start the switch, but it was good enough for a win."

Nash, still not fully recovered from the hamstring injury that caused him to miss the previous three games, returned to get 16 points and 14 rebounds. His three-pointer with 1:06 to play put the Suns ahead 98-94, then his two free throws made it 100-94 with 37.4 seconds to play.

"He's everything for them," Chauncey Billups said. "When they win, he's got to make every play, and when they lose, it's because he didn't make the play. That's a lot of pressure on one man, but he's taking it and running with it."

Stoudemire battled the Pistons' bruising front line for 26 points and 10 rebounds. Quentin Richardson scored 20, including 5-for-8 on three-pointers.

Rasheed Wallace, who had 22 points and 13 rebounds for the Pistons, sank a three-pointer to cut it to 100-97 0.5 seconds from the finish and Detroit had one last chance to tie it. But Billups' 25-footer was short and Detroit lost for the just second time in 15 games.

The Suns compiled the league's second-best record (44-14) with a pedal-to-the-metal style, but this was a different kind of game, played for the most part at the tempo the defending NBA champion Pistons prefer.

"I just don't think we played very well," Suns coach Mike D'Antoni said. "I think we can run better than that against these guys,

but they are the ultimate test, them and San Antonio."

Down 76-66 and with Nash resting on the bench, the Suns scored the first eight points of the fourth quarter, four by Stoudemire, to cut it to 76-74 on Joe Johnson's 18-footer with 9:20 left.

"I think it was huge that we could rest Steve and gain ground," D'Antoni said, "and have a fresh Steve Nash for the final five minutes."

Phoenix took the lead 85-84 when Nash sank two free throws 5:33 from the finish.

"It's not a statement, it's just saying that we're a high-caliber team that is capable of taking the fourth quarter," Stoudemire said. "We've got guys that are capable of doing it, and tonight me and Steve did."

Nash said the hamstring bothered him some.

"It's not 100 percent, but right now the plan is to only play if it's not getting worse and see if we can get it back to 100 percent on the fly," he said. "Tomorrow, we'll have to re-evaluate and see if it's OK."

Detroit coach Larry Brown made a thinly veiled reference at the officiating.

"We never got into the bonus the last three quarters," he said. "We consider we have 2 offensive rebounds and don't get to the bonus, it's tough."

But the Pistons also credited Phoenix's fourth-quarter play.

"We had them right where we wanted," Billups said. "We had our chance, and they hit the big shots down the stretch. We didn't."

Heat 106, Nets 90: At East Rutherford, N.J., Shaquille O'Neal had 20 points and 13 rebounds in his return from a three-game absence, and Dwyane Wade had 27 points, eight assists and six rebounds to help Miami end New Jersey's winning streak at three games.

Alonzo Mourning made his first appearance in his second stint with Miami during garbage time, playing the final 2:19 and grabbing two rebounds. Mourning, playing with a transplanted kidney, re-signed with the Heat this week after being traded from New Jersey to Toronto and then being waived by the Raptors.

Vince Carter had 27 points for the Nets.

Nuggets 96, Pacers 87: At Denver, Mar-



Detroit Pistons' Rasheed Wallace, front, works his way past Phoenix Suns' Shawn Marion on Thursday in Phoenix.

cus Camby had 17 points, 22 rebounds, seven assists and seven blocks, and Carmelo Anthony scored 28 in Denver's fifth straight victory.

The Nuggets improved to 12-4 since coach George Karl took over Jan. 27, and moved into a tie with the Lakers for the final playoff spot in the Western Conference.

Stephen Jackson led the Pacers with 16 points.

Indiana's Jermaine O'Neal sprained his right shoulder on a drive to the basket in the second quarter. X-rays were negative, but the All-Star forward was still in pain at halftime.

He said the trainer had to pop his shoulder back in place.

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division			
	W	L	Pct
Boston	26	14	.650
Philadelphia	27	14	.656
New Jersey	24	17	.588
New York	24	17	.588
Toronto	23	18	.563

Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct
Miami	22	22	.500
Washington	22	22	.500
Orlando	18	26	.409
Charlotte	12	32	.273
Atlanta	12	32	.273

Central Division

	W	L	Pct
Detroit	20	24	.455
Cleveland	19	25	.433
Chicago	19	25	.433
Indiana	22	22	.500
Milwaukee	13	31	.293

Western Conference

Southwest Division			
	W	L	Pct
San Antonio	24	16	.600
Phoenix	23	17	.575
Houston	22	18	.556
Golden State	21	19	.524
New Orleans	17	23	.429

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct
Seattle	40	14	.741
Denver	39	15	.723
Portland	28	26	.519
Utah	27	27	.500

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct
Phoenix	44	14	.759
Sacramento	32	26	.556
L.A. Lakers	28	20	.581
Golden State	17	28	.379

Thursday's games

Miami 106, New Jersey 90	
Denver 96, Indiana 87	
Phoenix 100, Detroit 97	

Friday's games

New York at Orlando	
Golden State at Washington	
Charlotte at Boston	
Chicago at Miami	
Utah at New Orleans	
Atlanta at Minnesota	
Milwaukee at Minnesota	
Chicago at Portland	
Indiana at Portland	
Dallas at L.A. Lakers	

Saturday's games

Denver at L.A. Clippers	
Philadelphia at Atlanta	
Washington at Charlotte	
Orlando at Phoenix	
Chicago at Milwaukee	
Portland at New York	
Golden State at New York	
Indiana at L.A. Lakers	

Sunday's games

Dallas at Houston	
Detroit at Sacramento	
San Antonio at Dallas	
Utah at San Antonio	
Golden State at Phoenix	
Portland at Golden State	
Golden State at New York	
Indiana at L.A. Lakers	

Thursday

Heat 106, Nets 90

MIAMI — E. James 51 2-3 15, Haslem 5 0-2 2, Wade 10 2-3 12, Anderson 2-4 4, Dool 0-0 0-0 0, Carter 12 1-2 12, Johnson 2-3 2-2 6, Butler 0-0 0-0, Mourning 0-0 0-0, Wang 0-0 0-0 0.	
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NEW JERSEY — Carter 21 11-17 27, Collins 12 4-12 22, Randolph 12 2-12 16, Vladek 12 2-12 16, Kidd 4 2-10 10, Robinson 0 0-0 0, P. J. 2-2 0-0 0, Dwyane Wade 27 10-17 22, Shaquille O'Neal 20 13-20 36.	
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NEW JERSEY — Carter 21 11-17 27, Collins 12 4-12 22, Randolph 12 2-12 16, Vladek 12 2-12 16, Kidd 4 2-10 10, Robinson 0 0-0 0, P. J. 2-2 0-0 0, Dwyane Wade 27 10-17 22, Shaquille O'Neal 20 13-20 36.	
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Tuesday

NEW JERSEY — Carter 21 11-17 27, Collins 12 4-12 22, Randolph 12 2-12 16, Vladek 12 2-12 16, Kidd 4 2-10 10, Robinson 0 0-0 0, P. J. 2-2 0-0 0, Dwyane Wade 27 10-17 22, Shaquille O'Neal 20 13-20 36.	
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Wednesday

NEW JERSEY — Carter 21 11-17 27, Collins 12 4-12 22, Randolph 12 2-12 16, Vladek 12 2-12 16, Kidd 4 2-10 10, Robinson 0 0-0 0, P. J. 2-2 0-0 0, Dwyane Wade 27 10-17 22, Shaquille O'Neal 20 13-20 36.	
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Thursday

NEW JERSEY — Carter 21 11-17 27, Collins 12 4-12 22, Randolph 12 2-12 16, Vladek 12 2-12 16, Kidd 4 2-10 10, Robinson 0 0-0 0, P. J. 2-2 0-0 0, Dwyane Wade 27 10-17 22, Shaquille O'Neal 20 13-20 36.	
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Nuggets hope Person provides outside threat

The Associated Press

DENVER — The Denver Nuggets may have finally found the outside shooting threat they've been missing all season, signing Wesley Person on Thursday to replace injured shooting guard Voshon Lenard for the play-off run.

Denver had been in need of an outside shooter

since Lenard went down with a torn Achilles tendon in the season opener.

The Nuggets had been searching since Lenard's injury, but couldn't find the right fit until Person was released by Miami on Tuesday.

"It's obvious we need more spacing," Nuggets coach George Karl said. "We've got some guys who's post-ups and penetrations will be because of the spacing. Sometimes you can trick teams, you have one shooter and they think you have three or four."

Expected to fill in as a spot-up shooter for the Heat, Person instead spent most of the season watching from the bench. He av-

eraged 3.9 points in just 16 games and had played just four games since Dec. 4 because he refused to go on the injured list.

Zo bitter over Nets' comments

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Miami's Alonzo Mourning brought some bitterness back to New Jersey with him Thursday prior to his first game in nearly three months.

He said Nets President Rod Thorn gave an unfair portrayal of him after trading him to Toronto. Mourning took issue with Thorn's statements in mid-December that the Nets believed he would never play another game for them.

Mourning, playing with a transplanted kidney, had gone on the injured list 10 weeks with knee tendinitis.

"I was hurt. I had some ailments that I was dealing with. It's not like I was hanging out," Mourning said. "For Rod to paint a picture like that is kind of unfair to me. If I really, really opened the truth, you guys would be amazed at some of the things that were said. But I don't think it's right to go there and do that."

Illini hope Big Ten title only the first

BY JIM PAUL

The Associated Press

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — Illinoi's got to cut down the Assembly Hall nets to celebrate a second consecutive Big Ten championship.

Yet there is still so much more to do, coach Bruce Weber said.

"March just started and we hope it's a long month for us," he said Thursday night after Illinois won its final home game of the season, defeating Purdue 85-40.

Brown scored a career-high 27 points and tied the school record with eight three-pointers, and Deron Williams added 21 points, 12 on three-pointers, as Illinois (29-0, 15-0) jumped to an 11-4 lead and was never in trouble. Brown had 24 points by halftime and the Illini led 50-26 at the break.

"Good luck," said Purdue forward Matt Kiefer when asked to advise future Illinois opponents. "You have to match their intensity and hope they're having a bad night."

The Illini have had no real bad nights this season. Even when they've struggled, they've won.

"When we were in doubt, when we were struggling, we found a way to win. And that's when I think you see how special they are," Weber said.

The Illini wrap up the regular season Sunday at Ohio State with a chance to be the first undefeat-

ed Big Ten team since Indiana went 18-0 in the conference in 1975-76. Illinois will be the No. 1 seed in the Big Ten tournament next week in Chicago.

Brown missed his first shot Thursday night. After that, just about everything he fired dropped through the basket.

"Once I came off the screens, the rim just looked so (big) and I just continued to follow through and they went in," he said.

The Illini were 15-for-27 from three-point range, setting a school record for three-pointers in a season with 265 — 10 more than in 2001-02.

"They were just unconscious," Purdue coach Gene Keady said. "That was a tremendous show of shooting ability."

Purdue (7-19, 3-12), playing without injured leading scorer Carl Landry, got 12 points from Gary Ware and 10 from Kiefer. The Boilermakers' only advantage was on the boards, where they outboarded Illinois 37-31.

"The one thing they know is tomorrow we're going to do rebounding drills," Weber said. "I don't care what time of the year it is, we can't let that be a factor and the difference in maybe a loss later on."

Illinois jumped out 11-4 at the start and Purdue got no closer than five thereafter. The Illini had a 21-0 run in the second half and led by as many as 45 points in handling Purdue's first straight loss.



Illinois guard Dee Brown drives against Purdue's David Teague during the first half of Thursday night's game at Champaign, Ill. Top-ranked Illinois improved to 29-0 with an 85-40 rout of Purdue, clinching the Big Ten regular-season title in the Fighting Illini's final home game.

Louisville's O'Bannon leaves 'em cheering

The Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Larry O'Bannon saved his best for last at Freedom Hall.

The Louisville native scored a career-high 33 points in his final home game to help No. 9 Louisville clinch a share of the Conference USA regular-season title with a 94-72 victory over No. 18 Charlotte on Thursday night.

"Larry O'Bannon had a very, very special night," Louisville coach Rick Pitino said. "It was a Hollywood ending for a nice young man."

The 6-foot-4 O'Bannon hit his first five three-point attempts and tied a school record with 26 points in the first half.

"Your hometown fans are going to remember you in your last game," O'Bannon said. "I like that. I know it was going to be like that."

Taquan Dean, diagnosed with mononucleosis last month, made six three-pointers and finished with 27 points for Louisville (25-4, 13-2), playing its final season in Conference USA before moving to the Big East.

"I wasn't feeling it, I was exhausted," Dean said. "Once I hit a couple of shots, then things started to go."



North Carolina's Sean May scored 32 points in a 91-76 victory over Florida State on Thursday night.

The Cardinals secured the top seed in the conference tournament next week in Memphis, and can wrap up their first outright regular-season Conference USA title Saturday at DePaul.

O'Bannon was 9-for-10 from the field in the first half.

"I just hit my first couple of three's and my teammates started looking for me," O'Bannon said. "I do it every day in practice. I guess it just carried over."

He left the floor with 1-01 to go, waving to the fans and embracing teammates as the crowd chanted "Lar-ree! Lar-ree!"

"You couldn't ask for anything better," O'Bannon said. "I never thought of a night like this. You don't dream it up."

Brendan Playvich hit seven three-pointers and scored 28 points for the 49ers (21-5, 12-3), Charlotte, a game behind Louisville, had won its last seven games.

"It was obviously a very difficult night for us," Charlotte coach Bobby Lutz said. "We knew we had to play really well with everything to have a chance to win. Obviously, we fell short."

No. 2 North Carolina 91, Florida St. 76: At Chapel Hill, N.C., Sean May scored 32 points to help North Carolina secure at least a share of the Atlantic Coast Conference regular-season title.

May also had 12 rebounds and freshman Marvin Williams added 17 points for the Tar Heels (25-3, 13-2 ACC, North Carolina, with scoring leader Rashad McCants out for the third straight game because of an intestinal disorder, can clinch the top seed in the ACC tournament with a home victory against Duke on Sunday.

Al Thornton scored 19 points for the Seminoles (11-18, 1-12).

No. 10 Washington 106, Cal-

ifornia 73: At Berkeley, Calif., Bobby Jones scored 22 points, and Washington made a school-record 16 three-pointers to beat California and move within one victory of at least a share of its first Pac-10 title in 20 years.

Jones was 5-for-6 from long range as the Huskies (24-4, 14-3) broke the previous school record of 14 set at Southern California in January 1998. Nate Robinson added 21 points and five threes, and Tre Simmons had 20 points and four threes.

Rod Benson led Cal (12-15, 5-12) with 17 points.

No. 17 Pacific 92, Cal St.-Fullerton 88: At Fullerton, Calif., Guillaume Yango scored 23 of his 27 points in the second half to lead Pacific to its 20th straight victory.

David Doubly and Jasko Korajick added 14 points apiece for the Tigers (24-2, 17-0 Big West). Ralph Holmes had 24 points for Fullerton (17-9, 11-6).

No. 25 Nevada 55, Hawaii 47: At Honolulu, Nick Fazekas had 20 points and 12 rebounds to help Nevada wrap up the Western Athletic Conference regular-season title.

Kevin Pinkney added 14 points and 13 rebounds for Nevada (23-5, 15-2). Matt Gibson led Hawaii (14-12, 6-11) with 14 points.

Redick has big day as Duke rolls by Miami

BY KEITH PARSONS

The Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. — Miami started out with a box-and-one defense on J.J. Redick, and he responded by making his first two shots. He never really slowed down, turning in another fabulous performance in what is fast becoming one of the top individual seasons in Duke history.

Redick scored 29 points, nearly matching the Hurricanes' point for point into the second half, and Daniel Ewing had 14 points and 10 assists in his last home game to help the sixth-ranked Blue Devils to a 83-59 victory on Thursday night.

The margin of defeat was the worst of the season for Miami, topping a 20-point loss at North Carolina.

"They came out in what was supposed to be a box-and-one," Redick said. "We shot them out of it pretty quick."

Shelden Williams added 14 points and 12 rebounds for the Blue Devils (22-4, 11-4 Atlantic Coast Conference), who won the regular season Sunday at No. 2 North Carolina. Duke won the first meeting 71-70.

Daniel is really the consummate winner. "Blue Devils coach Mike Krzyzewski said: 'He's just a kid you want to be around all the time. It's been perfect for us. He had 10 assists and one turnover. I'm going to call (former Duke point guard) Bobby Hurley and tell him that he never did that."

Robert Hite scored 17 for the Hurricanes (16-11, 7-9), who likely need to advance a couple rounds in the ACC tournament to earn a bid to the NCAA tournament.

"I would hope that we would not be intimidated or in awe, but obviously something caused us to not want to execute," Miami coach Frank Haith said. "There's something that made that happen."

Redick showed off his new hairstyle — he and walk-on Patrick Davidson sported matching buzz cuts — then made his first two shots on a way to 18 points in the first half. He came off a double screen by Shavlik Randolph and Reggie Love to swish a jump shot from behind the arc midway through the opening 20 minutes for his ninth point at the time, Miami had only eight.

That led the Cameron Crazies to chant "J.J.'s winning!" and the theme continued through almost the entire half. Redick had personal leads on the Hurricanes at 3-2, 6-4, 9-8, 11-8, 14-11 and 16-14, but a late dry spell for the ACC's leading scorer dropped him four points behind at the break.

"I wanted to come out aggressive," Redick said. "We got a couple of days off and really had great weather over the last few days, and we were ready for this game."

Few bringing many victories to Gonzaga

BY NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS
The Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — Gonzaga coach Mark Few isn't considered in the same league as Duke's Mike Krzyzewski.

But he's doing quite well in his first head-coaching gig.

In his sixth season at Gonzaga, Few's winning percentage of 81 ranks among the elite coaches in Division I history with at least five years on the job.

"They continue to impress and amaze all of us," said Brad Holland, coach of San Diego, the only West Coast Conference team to interrupt Gonzaga's string of five league tournament titles in the six seasons. "They keep coming up with great talent and great teams."

In what was supposed to be a rebuilding year in a much-tougher WCC, No. 12 Gonzaga (23-4, 12-2) once again won the regular-season title and a bye into the semifinals this weekend's league tournament. The Zags are shoos-ins for a seventh consecutive trip to the NCAA tournament.

Gonzaga plays in a low-profile league which doesn't provide the steady diet of top opponents that face teams in the power confer-

ences. Few has not won a national title or led a team beyond the round of 16 in the NCAA tournament.

Still, the Bulldogs have become fixtures in Top 25.

Living in Spokane, a quiet city of 200,000 in eastern Washington, Few, 42, and his staff have combed the world for players who allow the Zags to reload each season. This team features players from Martinique, Brazil, Canada and New Zealand.

Few's Gonzaga teams are 156-36 since he took over at the beginning of the 1999-2000 season. Only Everett Case at North Carolina State (161) and Roy Williams at Kansas (159) have more game over their first six seasons.

Gonzaga and Duke are the only Division I teams that have lost fewer than 10 games in each of the past six seasons. Under Few, the Zags have records of 26-9, 26-7, 29-4, 24-9 and 28-3. They were 26-7 under Dan Monson in 1998.

Few spent 10 years as an assistant before succeeding Monson, who moved to Minnesota. Gonzaga has made seven NCAA appearances and three in the NIT since Few arrived on campus.



Coach Mark Few continues to build Gonzaga into an elite program in his sixth season.

Through all his success, Few, the son of an Oregon minister, has remained a quiet, low-profile family man, displaying little interest in moving to a bigger program. He just built a big new house and indulges a passion for fly fishing and building a national hoops crew.

He said this has been a special season.

"This league championship means as much to us as anything," Few said. "The league is the best it's been in the 16 years I've been up here."

This season's team had only one senior starter and has numerous freshman and sophomores in key roles. Yet the Zags, playing a tougher non-conference schedule, beat such luminaries as Oklahoma State, Washington and Georgia Tech. On of their losses came to top-ranked and undefeated Illinois.

Deacon: Teams try to turn Paul's drive against him

DEACON, FROM BACK PAGE

His you-won't-beat-me attitude might be his best asset, but it's exactly what opponents are counting on in trying to throw him off his game. While he's polite and relaxes by listening to gospel music off the court, he's downright feisty on it.

"At times I think people mistake my competitive nature for arrogance or as a dirty player," Paul said. "I don't care who's in front of me. Whatever I'm going to do to win, that's what I'm going to do."

Paul has a drive that few can match. In a high-publicized feat as a high school senior, he scored 61 points in a game to honor his grandfather, who had been off his death days earlier at age 61.

In that game, he scored the final points when he made a basket and was fouled, but he intentionally missed the free throw to stay at 61 — seven points shy of breaking a 52-year-old North Carolina scoring record.

His competitiveness showed from an early age — he once hit a playmate, the son of former NBA player and coach Sidney Lowe, in daycare for taking his snack — and has never waned.

His father, Charles, remembers a 4-year-old Clark getting angry during basketball games against his older brother, C.J., now a senior guard at Division II Saint Joseph's University, because he was too short to win.

Two years later, Chris inked some parents during flag football games because his aggressive blocks knocked opponents to the ground.

"Whatever sport he played," his father says, "he wanted to be the best."

That urge still seems insatiable. Paul and Gray challenge each other on everything from who can make the most baskets on a goal in their dorm room to bowling, which Paul takes seriously enough to own his own ball which looks like an ABA basketball.

Even his 10-year-old cousin doesn't get a pass.

"If I play 1-on-1, I'll let him get a couple of points," Paul said, "but in the end, I'm going to win. I hate for another person to be able to say that they beat me."

Paul says he thinks of nothing other than going to the Final Four. His determination is clear, but it's also a convenient way to avoid the question that Demon Deacons fans desperately want answered.

For now, Paul says he's not thinking about leaving for the NBA after the season.

"After the season, I'll probably think about it a lot," he said. "But right now, there ain't nothing like playing college basketball — the environment, being able to go to class the day after you beat Carolina and Duke. There's nothing like that."

Conference tournament scoreboard

America East Conference
At Binghamton University Events Center
Yeshiva, N.Y.
First Round
Friday, March 4
New Hampshire vs. Maryland-Baltimore
Cortland
Story Brook vs. Hartford
Quarterfinals
Saturday, March 5
Albany, N.Y. vs. Binghamton
Vermont vs. New Hampshire-Maryland
Baltimore County winner
Northeastern vs. Stony Brook-Hartford
winner
Boston University vs. Maine
Semifinals
Sunday, March 6
Albany-Binghamton winner vs. Vermont
New Hampshire-Maryland-Baltimore County winner vs. Boston University
Northeastern-Stony Brook-Hartford winner vs. Boston University
Championship
At Higher-Seeded Team
Saturday, March 12
Semifinal winners

Atlantic Sun Conference
At The Club Event Center
Nashville, Tenn.
First Round
Thursday, March 3
Gardner-Webb vs. Troy
Central Florida II, Mercer
Belmont 67, Georgia State 64
Jacksonville 68, Lipscomb 64
Semifinals
Friday, March 4
Gardner-Webb vs. Jacksonville
Central Florida vs. Belmont
Championship
Saturday, March 5
Semifinal winners

Big Sky Conference
First Round
Saturday, March 5
Eastern Washington at Montana
Weber State at Sacramento State
At Memorial Coliseum
Portland, Ore.
Semifinals
Tuesday, March 8
Montana State vs. higher-seeded first-round winner
Portland State vs. lower-seeded first-round winner
Championship
Wednesday, March 9
Semifinal winners

Big South Conference
First Round
Tuesday, March 1
Charleston Southern 68, Western High Point 88, at Carolina-Ashville 93, OT
W. Virginia 70, Coastal Carolina 62
Birmingham-Southern 40, Norfolk 40
Semifinals
Thursday, March 3
Charleston Southern 58, High Point 55
Winthrop 78, Birmingham-Southern 64
Championship
Saturday, March 5
Charleston Southern at Winthrop

Colonial Athletic Association
At Richmond College
Richmond, Va.
First Round
Friday, March 4
James Madison vs. William & Mary
Delaware vs. Towson
Quarterfinals
Saturday, March 5
Old Dominion vs. James Madison-William & Mary winner
Drexel vs. Hofstra
Virginia Commonwealth vs. Delaware-Towson winner
Championship
Sunday, March 6
North Carolina-Wilmington vs. George Mason
Semifinals
Monday, March 7
Old Dominion-James Madison-William & Mary winner vs. Drexel-Hofstra winner
VCU-Delaware-Towson winner vs. North Carolina-Wilmington-George Mason winner
Championship
Monday, March 7
Semifinal winners

Horizon League
First Round
Tuesday, March 1
Wright State 63, Butler 57
Ypsilanti of Chicago 78, Youngstown State 75
Illinois-Chicago 64, Cleveland State 65
At U.S. Cellular Arena
Milwaukee
Second Round
Wednesday, March 2
Detroit vs. Wright State
Detroit of Chicago vs. Illinois-Chicago winner
Championship
Saturday, March 5
Wisconsin-Green Bay vs. Detroit-Wright State winner
Wisconsin-Milwaukee vs. Detroit of Chicago-Illinois-Chicago winner
At Milwaukee
Milwaukee
Championship
Tuesday, March 8
Semifinal winners

Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference
At HSEC Arena
Buffalo, N.Y.
First Round
Friday, March 4
Iona vs. Siena
Catholic vs. Manhattan
Manhattan vs. Loyola, Md.
Semifinals
Saturday, March 5
St. Peter's vs. Iona-Siena winner
Rider vs. Catholic-Manhattan winner
Fairfield vs. Manhattan-Loyola, Md. winner
Championship
Sunday, March 6
Niagara vs. Rider
Rider-Catholic-Manhattan winner vs. Fairfield-Manhattan-Loyola, Md. winner
Championship
Monday, March 7
Semifinal winners

Mid-Continent Conference
At John G. Hammans Arena
Tulsa, Okla.
First Round
Friday, March 4
Oral Roberts vs. Southern Utah State
Missouri-Kansas City vs. Oakland, Calif.
Sunday, March 6
Indiana-Purdue-Indianapolis vs. Western Illinois
Valparaiso vs. Chicago State
Semifinals
Monday, March 7
Oral Roberts-Southern Utah winner vs. IUPUI-Indianapolis-Western Illinois winner
VCU-Oakland winner vs. Valparaiso-Chicago State winner
Championship
Tuesday, March 8
Semifinal winners

Missouri Valley Conference
At Savvis Center
St. Louis
First Round
Friday, March 4
Bradley vs. Evansville
Friday, March 4
Southern Illinois vs. SIU-Edwardsville
Semifinals
Saturday, March 5
Southern Illinois vs. SIU-Edwardsville
Southern Iowa vs. Southwest Missouri State
Wichita State vs. Drake-Evansville winner
Championship
Sunday, March 6
Southern Illinois vs. Indiana State winner
Southern Iowa-SW Missouri State winner vs. Wichita State-Drake-Evansville winner
Championship
Monday, March 7
Semifinal winners

Northeast Conference
First Round
Thursday, March 3
Monmouth, N.J. 24, Connecticut State 53
Fairleigh Dickinson 78, St. Francis, N.Y. 60
Wagner 68, Robert Morris 65
St. Francis University 61, St. Francis, Pa. 67
Semifinals
Saturday, March 5
Wagner at Monmouth, N.J.
Long Island University at Fairleigh Dickinson
Championship
Wednesday, March 9
Semifinal winners

Ohio Valley Conference
First Round
Thursday, March 3
Tennessee Tech 72, Eastern Illinois 68
Western Kentucky 71, Saint Louis 66
Eastern Kentucky 74, Tennessee State 68
Championship
At The Gaylord Entertainment Center
Nashville, Tenn.
Semifinals
Friday, March 4
Tennessee Tech vs. Austin Peay
Eastern Kentucky vs. Southeast Missouri State
Championship
Saturday, March 5
Semifinal winners

Patriot League
First Round
Friday, March 4
At The Heart Center
Worcester, Mass.
Lehigh vs. Colgate
Army at Colgate
At The Sojka Pavilion
Lewisburg, Pa.
Semifinals
Saturday, March 5
At The Heart Center
Worcester, Mass.
Holy Cross-Army winner vs. Lehigh-Colgate winner
Championship
At The Sojka Pavilion
Lewisburg, Pa.
Saturday, March 5
Bucknell-Lafayette winner vs. American-Navy winner
Championship
At Higher-Seeded Team
Friday, March 11
Semifinal winners

Southern Conference
At McKeesport Arena
Chattanooga, Tenn.
First Round
Wednesday, March 2
Elon 64, Ford 59
Georgia Southern 69, Western Carolina 57
Semifinals
Thursday, March 3
Davidson 67, Elon 53
Western Carolina 59, Georgia Southern 71
Semifinals
Friday, March 4
Davidson vs. Western Carolina
Elon vs. Georgia Southern
Championship
Saturday, March 5
Semifinal winners

East Tennessee State 87, Furman 84
Appalachian State 78, The Citadel 59
Quarterfinals
Saturday, March 5
Davidson 67, Elon 53
Western Carolina 59, Georgia Southern 71
Semifinals
Friday, March 4
Davidson vs. Western Carolina
Elon vs. Georgia Southern
Championship
Saturday, March 5
Semifinal winners

Sun Belt Conference
At Denton, Texas
Friday, March 4
At Killebrew Arena
Dallas, Texas
South Alabama vs. Florida International
Arkansas State vs. North Texas
Middle Tennessee State vs. New Mexico State
At The Super Center
Denton, Texas
Semifinals
Saturday, March 5
Arkansas-Louisiana Tech vs. South Alabama-Florida International winner
Denver vs. Arkansas State-North Texas winner
Championship
Sunday, March 6
Western Kentucky vs. New Orleans
Arkansas State vs. Florida International-Tennessee State-New Mexico State winner
Championship
Monday, March 7
Denver-Arkansas State-New Orleans winner vs. W. Kentucky-New Orleans winner
Arkansas State-South Alabama-Florida International winner vs. La-Lafayette-Middle Tennessee-Western Kentucky-South Alabama-Florida International winner
Championship
Tuesday, March 8
Semifinal winners

West Coast Conference
At The Leavert Center
Sacramento, Calif.
First Round
Saturday, March 5
Pepperdine vs. Loyola Marymount
San Francisco vs. Santa Clara
Semifinals
Sunday, March 6
San Diego vs. Pepperdine-Loyola Marymount winner
San Francisco vs. Santa Clara-Portland winner
Championship
Monday, March 7
Semifinal winners

Baseball begins new drug testing policy

Players hoping changes will help boost image

The Associated Press

Josh Beckett was one of the Florida Marlins summoned on the first day of baseball's new era of drug testing, and he welcomed the chance to help improve the sport's image.

"It's something we've got to do to clear our name," Beckett said Thursday in Jupiter, Fla.

All of baseball seemingly has to prove its innocence, which is why players agreed to the new deal which calls for more testing, additional banned performance-enhancing substances and a 10-day suspension for a first offense.

Not all players agree with the new policy, though.

Los Angeles Dodgers second baseman Jeff Kent told the San Francisco Chronicle that testing should be supervised by an independent body, that amphetamines also should be banned and that penalties should be more along the lines of the Olympic movement, where first offenses generally merit a two-year ban.

Jason Giambi, one player looking to restore his image — on and off the field — began his comeback from a season wrecked by injury and an offseason marred by the steroid controversy.

Giambi walked twice and grounded out as the New York Yankees opened their exhibition season with a 2-2 tie against the Pittsburgh Pirates.

"I'm excited to get out there, getting a chance to play and have positive at-bats," Giambi said. "That's the biggest thing, tracking the ball well. And when you start doing that, you can start getting pitches to hit and hitting them hard and go from there."

Fans in the sellout crowd of 10,041

cheered Giambi on the cool, gray after-noon.

"They've been unbelievably supportive, so that's exciting," Giambi said.

After playing on a bad knee for the second half of 2003, Giambi's 2004 season was wrecked by a sprained right ankle, an intestinal parasite and a benign pituitary tumor. He hit just .077 with one homer and five RBIs in 52 at-bats after the All-Star break, too weak to come back and contribute in the stretch run.

In December, the San Francisco Chronicle reported he told a federal grand jury in 2003 that he had used steroids.

For the Pirates, Kip Wells gave up three hits and two runs in two innings against the Yankees. The right-hander pitched just one out after Aug. 13 because of a strained elbow.

Other games:

Red Sox 4, Twins 3: At Fort Myers, Fla., Matt Clement allowed one run in two innings and Shawn Wooten homered in a win for Boston, which was playing its first game since winning its first World Series title in 86 years last October.

Giants 9, Angels 8: At Tempe, Ariz., Pedro Feliz — playing for Barry Bonds, who is rehabbing his knee — Moises Alou and Edgaro Alfonzo each had run-scoring singles for San Francisco. All MVP Vladimir Guerrero hit a two-run double off Armando Benitez for the Angels, playing their first game as the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim.

Devil Rays 7, Reds 3: At St. Petersburg, Fla., Alex Gonzalez had three hits, three RBIs and made a spectacular diving grab in his first game at third base for Tampa Bay.

Orioles 8, Marlins 4: At Jupiter, Brian Roberts went 2-for-3, scored twice and drove in a run for Baltimore. Sammy Sosa



New York Yankees first baseman Jason Giambi grounds out in the third inning against the Pittsburgh Pirates on Thursday in Tampa, Fla. Giambi was 0-for-1 in the 2-2 tie.

has a groin strain and did not make the trip.

Al Leiter, an offseason acquisition by Florida, allowed three hits, walked two and hit a batter in two innings. He was charged with three runs, one earned.

Indians 7, Astros 3: At Winter Haven, Fla., Travis Hafner hit a two-run homer and Jake Westbrook struck out two in two innings to lead Cleveland.

Nationals 9, Bethune-Cookman 6: At Viera, Fla., Washington free-agent signee Esteban Loaiza allowed two hits and three runs — one earned — over 2 1/3 innings.

Cubs 2, Athletics 1: At Phoenix, Aramis Ramirez hit a two-run homer off Joe Blanton, and Carlos Zambrano pitched two shut-out innings for the Cubs. Dan Haren pitched two scoreless innings in his A's debut.

Braves 9, Dodgers 8, 6 innings, rain: At Vero Beach, Fla., Andrew Jones and Brian Jordan homered off Jeff Weaver, who allowed six runs and seven hits in 2 1/3 innings for Los Angeles.

Dodgers outfielder Jayson Werth, hit on the left wrist by a pitch Wednesday, has a small fracture and might not be ready to play on Opening Day.

Tigers 9, Phillies 1: At Clearwater, Fla., Rondell White had three hits, and Dewey Young homered as Detroit spoiled Charlie Manuel's debut as Philadelphia's manager.

Mariners 5, Padres 4: At Peoria, Ariz., Ryan Franklin pitched two scoreless innings and Raul Ibanez had an RBI single for Seattle.

Royals 6, Rangers 4: At Surprise, Ariz., Mike Sweeney showed no lingering effects of the back problems that caused him to miss 110 games the past two seasons by going 3-for-3 for Kansas City. Kenny Rogers gave up a run on two hits in one inning for Texas.

Diamondbacks 4, White Sox 3: At Tucson, Ariz., Russ Ortiz allowed two hits in his first two innings for Arizona, and Mark Buehrle gave up two unearned runs and five hits over three innings in his first action of the spring for Chicago.

House panel asks Canseco to testify on steroid use

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former slugger Jose Canseco and several players he has accused of joining him in abusing steroids have been invited to testify before a House committee.

"There's a cloud over baseball, and perhaps a public discussion of the issues, with witnesses testifying under oath, can provide a glimpse of sunlight," said Rep. Tom Davis, R-Va., chairman of the House Government Reform Committee. "I'm extremely concerned about the message being sent to children."

Davis and the top Democrat on the panel, Rep. Henry Waxman of California, announced Thursday that they were inviting Canseco and six other former or active players, including the New York Yankees Jason Giambi and former St. Louis Cardinal Mark McGwire, to testify at a March 17 hearing.

A spokesman wrote for Waxman, who last week wrote Davis to urge hearings on baseball's re-



Briefs

response to the steroid scandal, said they don't know if the players will agree to attend. Commissioner Bud Selig has also been invited.

Canseco, in a recently released book, admits using steroids and alleges that he injected the drugs with McGwire and introduced steroids to other stars, including Rafael Palmeiro of the Baltimore Orioles. Palmeiro and others named by Canseco have denied using the performance-enhancing drugs.

The San Francisco Chronicle reported in December that Giambi told a federal grand jury in 2003 that he had used steroids.

Also on the invitation list are Palmeiro, Boston Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling, current Baltimore Orioles slugger Sammy Sosa and Frank Thomas of the Chicago White Sox.

At Boston's camp in Fort Myers, Schilling said the call to

testify was news to him and that he will consult with the union.

"We'll see what happens," he said. "I have no idea what it's about."

Major League Baseball and the players' association in January agreed to a tougher steroid-testing program in the wake of allegations that Giambi and Barry Bonds were steroid users. Bonds has denied knowingly taking the drugs.

Case postponed for O's Ponson

ORANJESTAD, Aruba — The assault case against Baltimore Orioles pitcher Sidney Ponson was postponed Thursday, and a judge gave both sides until May 10 to reach an out-of-court agreement.

The 28-year-old Ponson is accused of committing violence alone or in the company of others in public, kicking a person in the head and battering a person by hitting him in the face with his fist.

If convicted, Ponson faces a

maximum sentence of four years in jail, a fine and community service.

Judge Bob Wit, flown in from the nearby Dutch Caribbean island of Curacao to give the case a sense of impartiality, said he took the pitcher's career into consideration in postponing the case.

Wit said that Ponson's livelihood could be jeopardized if he has a criminal record because his U.S. work visa could be taken away.

Ponson allegedly punched a local judge after several people on a beach in the west-coast town of Boca Catalina told Ponson that he was harassing people with his personal watercraft and operating it recklessly.

Drese, Rangers finalize deal

SURPRISE, Ariz. — Ryan Drese doesn't have to worry about being the last player cut by the Texas Rangers this spring. Now he just has to keep performing.

The Rangers finalized a new \$6 million, two-year contract Thurs-

day with Drese, who evolved into a surprise No. 2 starter and a 14-game winner last season. He was the first Ranger recalled after being the last cut in camp.

Drese made \$370,000 last season, and the Rangers were prepared to renew the right-hander's contract at that figure without a multiyear deal. The Rangers also have a \$3 million option for 2007.

Last year was a breakout season for Drese, who went 14-10 with a 4.20 ERA in 33 starts and 207 2-3 innings. Drese and top starter Kenny Rogers (18-9 over 211 2-3 innings) were the only pitchers to throw more than 100 innings for Texas last season.

Mets' Heredia to undergo tests

PORT ST. LUCIE, Fla. — Mets reliever Felix Heredia was sent back to New York on Thursday after experiencing numbness in his pitching hand.

Heredia allowed one run in a shaky inning Wednesday and took the loss in the team's spring training opener against the Washington Nationals. The left-hander was scheduled for tests Friday.

Miami coming with loss of independence

Hurricanes' baseball could suffer from move to join ACC

By JEFF PRICE
The Associated Press

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — Forgive coach Jim Morris if he's not quite as ecstatic as everyone else on campus about Miami's move into the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Sure, basketball attendance has never been better and the football team can finally develop some conference rivalry that doesn't require a three-hour plane ride.

Baseball, however, has flourished while playing a home-heavy, independent schedule — even when the school's other teams were in the Big East. But those days are now gone, meaning Miami's annual pursuit of a College World Series berth in Omaha just got tougher.

"It's not going to make it any easier for us in particular, because the system we've had the last 40 years has worked pretty good," Morris said. "We've been in the World Series a lot."

"I don't think it's anything that's going to be an advantage for the baseball program, but I think it's an advantage for the athletic department."

After 60 seasons as college baseball's most prominent independent powerhouse, the Hurricanes were scheduled to play their first conference game Fri-

day when North Carolina State visited to open a three-game weekend series.

With that, the independent era formally ends.

Miami had unparalleled success as an independent: four national championships, 21 College World Series berths and a record 32 straight NCAA regional appearances.

But gone are the days when the Hurricanes could schedule 43 home games and 12 on the road — just three outside the state (those were in Georgia) — as they did last season. Now there will be four or five road series against ACC foes to deal with.

So long, New York Tech. Hello, Georgia Tech and Virginia Tech.

Former coach Ron Fraser led Miami during most of its independent era, acting as a one-man PR machine, luring fans by any means. That allowed the team to bring in revenues most programs couldn't approach.

"Nobody talked about it," Fraser said. "Nobody was asking to get us in (a league). ... We couldn't get anything better than what we had. We were making money."

College baseball, even for big conferences, was never a money sport, but Fraser made Miami the exception. Morris continued that tradition when he took over in 1994.



Miami's Brendan Katin, left, celebrates an inside-the-park home run during an exhibition game against the Florida Marlins, with teammates Roger Tomas (9) and Alex Garabedian (14), Tuesday. After 60 seasons as college baseball's most prominent independent powerhouse, Miami plays its first conference game Friday against North Carolina State.

"I think Miami could have always been an independent in baseball," he said. "Because as long as we stayed one of the top teams in the country, people always wanted a chance to knock us off."

"We always have the best weather, people wanted to come

down early and play. It wouldn't have been a problem."

And the respect level is already there: Miami was picked to win the ACC this season.

"I don't think you will see any drop-off whatsoever," Florida State coach Mike Martin said. "In fact, you'll probably see them

move it up a notch because they've always been a program that was able to move up a notch when they had to."

Morris wasn't dismayed with the move to the ACC; he was one of the school's main proponents for league inclusion. A North Carolina native, Morris coached Georgia Tech from 1982-93, leading the Yellow Jackets to four straight ACC titles.

"I always wanted to join the ACC because I thought it was a great conference and something that would be good for all of us," Morris said. "I think playing in a conference adds some excitement."

Morris' connection to the ACC is so strong, Miami had been scheduled to play in the full ACC slate in 2004 before the ACC expanded, said Dee Todd, an assistant ACC commissioner who oversees baseball.

"We were already set to have Miami scheduled into our 2005 season to play all the schools," said Todd, who knows Morris from her days as a track coach at Georgia Tech. "That was going to help them a lot, because it was becoming a difficult to schedule games."

Miami's entry is also good news for the ACC, which has not had a College World Series winner since Wake Forest in 1985.

"It's a home run, literally," Todd said. "When we were talking about expansion, the secret was that it made us so much better in baseball — even though it wasn't a priority. ... The addition of Miami, it separates us from the other conferences."

Jockey Elliott awaits deportation decision

The Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Stewart Elliott, who won last year's Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes aboard Smarty Jones, was back riding horses at Aqueduct Racetrack on Thursday, a day after his release by federal immigration officials who detained the jockey because he had pleaded guilty to felony assault charges.

Elliott was winless in four races, with his best finish a second aboard With Due Respect in the fifth race. His agent, Joe Rosen, said Elliott will continue riding while his case is being determined by an immigration judge.

"The way we understand it, Stewart can't leave the country until there's a resolution," Rosen said.

Elliott, a native-born Canadian, could become one of the tens of thousands of immigrants deported each year for committing a felony.

After the 40-year-old jockey returned from a trip to Hong Kong in December, a computerized database flagged his name at New York airport as he got off the flight. Although he is a lawful permanent resident of the United

States, his ability to remain here was jeopardized in 2001 when he pleaded guilty to aggravated assault in New Jersey.

Under a tough-as-nails U.S. immigration-reform law passed in 1996, "an alien convicted of an aggravated felony shall be conclusively presumed to be deportable." It also encourages the deportation of people convicted of a crime of "moral turpitude."

The wheels of the country's massive immigration bureaucracy have already started to turn, albeit slowly.

Elliott was detained Tuesday after an official determined that the conviction probably made the jockey ineligible to re-enter the United States. He was released Wednesday.

The jockey's spokeswoman said she is confident the problem will be cleared up quickly, but immigration experts aren't so sure.

"If he is an aggravated felon, there is no wiggle room," said Elliott's lawyer, associate director of advocacy for the American Immigration Lawyers Association. "The discretion is largely taken away. He will be deported."

David Leopold, an immigration



Stewart Elliott

lawyer in Cleveland, said it is possible that Elliott's New Jersey sentence was structured in such a way that would allow him to avoid being classified as an aggravated felon, since he served no jail time. In that case, an immigration judge might allow him to stay, Leopold said.

Elliott spokeswoman Kelly Wietmsa said the jockey had been assured by his lawyers that there are ways to resolve the matter.

"What troubles me the most about this whole thing is, why now?" Wietmsa asked. "This happened years ago, and they stopped him in December? He was in the Kentucky Derby last year! It was all over the news."

This year, Elliott is the regular rider for Derby hopeful Rockport Harbor.

S. Williams retires from Dubai semi with injury

The Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Serena Williams retired from her semifinal match against Jelena Jankovic at the Dubai Women's Open on Friday with a strained tendon in her right shoulder.

Sports briefs

The unseeded Jankovic was leading 6-0, 4-3, when Williams pulled out 59 minutes into the match. That put Jankovic into the final against top-seeded Lindsay Davenport, who struggled through an upset stomach to beat Patty Schnyder 4-6, 7-5, 6-1.

Williams blamed the balls being used in the tournament for her injury.

"Ever since I have been practicing here, I am getting the same symptoms with my ribs and my arms hurting in a really bad way," Williams said. "It was hurting really bad. One more point and I think I was going to die."

All the players had a debate of these balls and I am not the only one talking about it. We all decided not to use these balls in the championships and in the tournaments leading up to the championships. It's only here and there that

these balls are being used."

Williams was so frustrated during the match that she smashed her racket three times after losing her serve in the opening game of the second set, receiving a racket-abuse warning.

Injunction allows Minardi back on track for Grand Prix

MELBOURNE, Australia — Minardi is back in the season-opening Formula One Grand Prix — for now.

Just when the smallest of the 10 F1 teams thought it had cleared a final hurdle and was going to race at the Australian Grand Prix, another unexpectedly developed: Stewards refused to allow the struggling team to practice Friday.

Minardi owner Paul Stoddart said he was shocked by the decision and immediately sought an injunction in court.

He won the injunction Friday, which means his Minardi racers will be allowed to practice Friday's practice session, with further court deliberations scheduled for Saturday afternoon.

It's still no guarantee that Minardi, which is trying to circumvent 2005 design regulations for its cars, will be allowed to race in Sunday's season-opening Grand Prix.

Blue Monster is docile

Mickelson among foursome that opens with 64, leads all-out scoring assault on defenseless Doral

The Associated Press

MIAMI — Phil Mickelson started making birdies and figured he better not stop, not with so many world-class players taking aim at a Blue Monster that lost its bite Thursday in the Ford Championship at Doral.

But it wasn't just the marquee names crowding the top of the leaderboard.

Mickelson made 10 birdies, including six on his last eight holes, for an 8-under 64 that gave him a share of the lead with Jose Maria Olazabal, Brian Davis of England and Marco Dawson.

Ninety-seven players in the 144-man field broke par in the Blue Monster, a record for the opening round at Doral. The previous mark was 90 sub-par scores in the first round of 2001.

Tiger Woods did his best to keep pace, making three straight birdies before the turn, settling for pars on the two par 5s on the back nine and making a 15-foot putt on the last hole for 65.

Dorland has 11 of the top 12 players in the world ranking, one of the strongest fields of the year, and most of them delivered the performance everyone expected. The U.S. Open champion Retief Goosen shot 67, while No. 1 Vijay Singh birdied three of his last four holes for a 68. David Toms, coming off an overwhelming victory in the Match Play Championship, showed he's human with only a 69.

Golf roundup

"When I know that the field is so strong, and you've got guys like Tiger and Vijay and Retief and Mike Weir and David Toms — guys who are making a lot of birdies and have the ability to shoot 62 or 63 — I find myself pushing to go lower," Mickelson said. "Four- or 5-under just isn't going to cut it with these guys in the field."

But they weren't the only ones going low on a cool, overcast day with hardly any wind.

There was a slight breeze out of the north at times, which made the closing holes particularly easy. Mickelson hammered a drive into the front bunker on the 372-yard 16th hole for an easy birdie, then hit another mammoth tee shot that left him only 70 yards from the pin on the 419-yard 17th hole.

From a good lie in the right rough just shy of a bunker on the 465-yard 18th, he flipped an 8-iron to 6 feet to close out another strong round.

"The wind was supposed to be early, and we were supposed to have rain in the evening or afternoon," Woods said. "Looks like we escaped all of that, so it was a nice day to post a good number."

No one was surprised that Mickelson had one of the lowest scores.

He had a 60 in the second round at Phoenix when he won for the first time this year. He had a 62 at Spyglass Hill, one of the toughest courses in northern California, on his way to a wire-to-wire victory at Pebble Beach.

Mickelson is 46-under par in his past eight rounds, dating to that 60 in the FBR Open.

Olazabal, the two-time Masters champion playing on sponsor's exemptions because he lost his PGA Tour card last year, made birdies on his final three holes to join Mickelson in the lead, and Davis joined them with an eagle on No. 8 and a string of birdies toward the end of the round.

Davis won Q-school and had the first-round lead in the Nissan Open two weeks ago before it started raining. He wound up the shot out of the playoff when the tournament was shortened to only 36 holes.

Dawson might have had the most impressive round. This was his first round since the Honda Classic a year ago because of surgery to repair a ruptured disc.

"I'm still in the learning stages of how much I can practice, how much I should practice, what are the signs of when I start to get fatigued and weak," Dawson said.

Jimenez leads by 2 in Dubai

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Miguel Angel Jimenez's main shot 7-under 65 Friday to take a



Mark O'Meara, defending champion of the Dubai Open, shot 72 on Friday and missed the cut by one shot at Emirates Golf Club in Dubai.

two-stroke lead over Ernie Els after the second round of the Dubai Desert Classic.

Els shot 68 for a two-day total of 10-under 134. Welsh golfer Stephen Dodd was three strokes off the lead after a 65 on the Majlis

course at the Emirates Golf Club.

Three other players, including former tournament winners Thomas Bjorn and Colin Montgomerie, were five strokes behind. Bjorn carded a 68 and Montgomerie shot 67.

Ever-growing sports landscape needs a trim

Tiger Woods' suggestion that a shorter PGA Tour season would make for a better one is too good to ignore.

Go's major domo looked at the field day before the Ford Championship at Doral began and counted 11 of the world's top dozen players entered. Last year, the season stretched 44 weeks and the top four — Vijay Singh, Woods, Ernie Els and Phil Mickelson — played together exactly eight times, and half of those were majors.

That got Woods thinking. "It would be more exciting for the fans, and I'm sure the sponsors and TV and everybody if we did play less often together," he said. "The only way you could do that is if we shortened the season."

So here's a better suggestion: Since fewer games would make for a better product in every sport, why stop at golf?

It's hardly the only sport that should start thinking about cinching its belt close to where supply meets demand. If not for their sake, then for ours. With few exceptions, every sport puts out too much junk for consumption just because they can. That's the case of being carted.

If all those leagues, conferences and sanctioning bodies had to

operate in a real competitive marketplace the way, say, McDonald's does, they'd have to shut down some franchises and pull a few items off the menu every now and then.

Think you couldn't live with less sports? Well, the NHL is in hibernation and nobody's noticed. Turn on the TV most nights and the long-standing knock about the NBA regular season being too long — "92 games to eliminate Cleveland from the playoffs" — still rings true if you substitute "Atlanta" or "New Orleans" for "Cleveland."

Cut those two off at 50 games and playoffs — remember when they were called "winter" sports? — and both are better by half.

Baseball can start by trimming back its 162 regular-season games, less to bring its records back in line to ease the transition to, let's say, 100 games and playoffs. If you don't think commissioner Bud Selig was serious when he uttered the C-word (contraction) a few years back, then you should

Jim Litke



know what he knows: The only people possibly excited about a Kansas City-Tampa Bay tilt in late September are the stadium vendors and the players' parents.

But here's another thing Selig and his pals in the sports' ownership club know: despite putting on of dozens of clunkers like that every season, the money keeps rolling in.

Much more of it rolls into the Yankees' coffers than say, the Royals' or the Devil Rays', which means those pinstripes would be even more profitable — not to mention watchable and honorable — if they beat up fewer paties and faced the Red Sox, Twins and Angels more.

There will always be underdogs, so there will always be underdogs, but they will mean more precisely because there will be less.

Don't think so? Television ratings have been slipping over the past decade or so for just about every sport except for NASCAR, which is growing, and the NFL, which is holding firm. Part of it is because of the spiraling audience, but part of it has to do with their approaches.

NASCAR had a hard time getting on the tube until 2001; it's catching up to demand. Pro football, on the other hand, limits its supply to each team playing once

a week. Two-thirds of the time a game is televised in a local market, it outdraws every other show on TV that week, including prime-time blockbusters like "CSI," "Survivor" and "Everybody Loves Raymond."

And there would be more love for baseball and basketball, hockey, golf, tennis, college football and basketball, etc., if there was a little less of each. But we'll grant you this much: The argument against cutbacks almost anywhere is seamless.

Players, owners, league executives, conferences, sanctioning bodies, TV networks and even sportswriters might blush sometimes repeating it, but they'll point out that as long as somebody is paying for the shock as well as the premium stuff, might as well put it on the tube and in arenas, too.

Maybe. Right now, attendance is still strong in most sports and sponsorship dollars are up, up, up across the board. Even hockey, which was flailing long before canceled the season, climbed from \$210 million to \$230 million the year before. Last year, companies in North America plunked down \$11.1 billion, and the IEG Sponsorship Report, which tracks industry trends, predicts spending will climb by 8.8 percent.

Meanwhile, network TV executives have been promising for 20 years to stop the spiraling rights fees they shell out for sporting events — only to get amnesia on the very day they sit down across a bargaining table to negotiate. And their rationale is that like everything else on TV, the games that aren't pulling their own financial weight disappear soon enough (remember the NFL?).

They're right, of course. Despite predictions to the contrary, the pie of sports has continued expanding and since every big-time sport enjoys a monopoly, it's possible they could go on growing forever. The problem with building an empire in the entertainment business, like any other business, is that sooner or later you run into somebody else's empire. That's where the real competition begins.

Remember that line from Bruce Springsteen, "There was 57 channels and nothin' on"? Today, the average household gets 100 — and if we're talking about sporting events really worth watching, by and large, there's still precious little on.

It's high time to start cutting. Be like Tiger Woods. Send along your suggestions.

Jim Litke is a national sports columnist for the Associated Press. Write to him at jlitke@ap.org.

Linemen living large

Foursome who do the grunt work strikes it rich; Packers lose two from O-line; Dallas signs trio

By BARRY WILNER

The Associated Press

Sometimes offensive linemen find big money and the spotlight.

It happened Thursday in NFL free agency, with Jonas Jennings, Mike Wahle, Marco Rivera and Ben Hamilton getting rich.

There were some more glamorous positions filled, with running back LaMont Jordan landing in Oakland and sacks specialist Reggie Hayward signing with Jacksonville. But this was a day for the blockers.

San Francisco signed Buffalo tackle Jennings, one of the better offensive linemen available, to a seven-year, \$36 million deal. The Niners allowed 52 sacks last season during their 2-14 campaign.

"I couldn't pass up the chance of playing for a team like the 49ers that has the history and some of the great players of all of the Super Bowls they have done in the past," Jennings said. "Growing up (in Atlanta), ironically, they were my favorite team."

They became his favorite again by offering so much money.

"Jonas will help us rebuild an offensive line that certainly needs rebuilding," 49ers coach Mike Nolan said. "I've always believed that the offensive line is the foundation to any great offense. ... You see you have an opportunity to get a good player, certainly a player like Jonas, then that is what you do."

Carolina, which struggled with its line last year, filled a hole with Wahle, who spent seven seasons at guard and tackle protecting Brett Favre in Green Bay. Wahle signed a five-year deal worth about \$25 million.

"I knew I wanted to come here. I think this team is going to be good for a number of years," he said. "I have been in this league seven years and I have never been to a Super Bowl and that is real important to me."

Rivera also is leaving the Packers. The guard got \$20 million for five years, with a \$9 million signing bonus, to join the Cowboys.

Dallas also signed defensive tackle Jason

Ferguson from the Jets. The Cowboys spent \$28 million in signing bonuses on cornerback Anthony Henry, who signed Wednesday, Rivera and Ferguson.

"They're expensive, but the value is there," owner Jerry Jones said after giving Ferguson \$21.5 million for five years and Henry \$25 million for the same span.

Of the prosperous linemen, only Hamilton stayed put. He re-signed with the Denver Broncos for five years and could move from guard to center, where Tom Nalen has been a fixture. Hamilton reportedly got \$16 million.

Jordan's move to Oakland cost the Raiders a five-year, \$27.5 million contract with an \$11 million signing bonus.

"I know people are going to say 'He's never carried the load' and there are going to be a lot of questions. I accept the challenge because I know I'm going to succeed," said Jordan, a backup to Curtis Martin with the Jets for four years. "Now, not only I have the talent but I have the knowledge and what it takes to be a pro."

The Jets didn't need long to replace Jordan, agreeing to a five-year contract with Derrick Baylock. Baylock leaves Kansas City for an \$11 million contract.

Along with Wade, Carolina signed cornerback Ben Lucas, a three-year starter for Seattle.

"I knew before I even got off the plane that I wanted to sign with Carolina," Lucas said. "Anybody in the NFL knows that the Carolina Panthers have the most talented D-line in the NFL. If I had to choose between Seattle and Carolina, I would have easily chose Carolina."

Hayward, who had 19 sacks the past two seasons, got a five-year contract worth \$25 million from Jacksonville and will team up front with Pro Bowl tackles Marcus Stroud and John Henderson.

"This is a dream job for a D-end," Hayward said. "I know that from Marco and John in their acquiring of so much attention, it creates a lot of one-on-one outside. They're dominant players, and when you have dominant players on the D-line like these two big, humongous guys, it allows you to play a less-stress game."



Former Buffalo Bills offensive tackle Jonas Jennings signed a seven-year, \$36 million contract with San Francisco on Thursday.

Jacksonville also agreed to terms with free agent defensive tackle Martin Chase and free agent quarterback Nate Hybl.

The New York Giants signed middle linebacker Antonio Pierce, a top defender for Washington last season in his first year as a starter. Pierce's departure to a division opponent hurt the Redskins.

The Redskins did add a player, agreeing to terms with free agent receiver David Patten, who caught 44 passes for 800 yards and seven touchdowns last season for the Super Bowl champion Patriots.

The Patriots got some help at cornerback, acquiring Duane Starks in a trade with Arizona for a third-round pick in April's draft.

Safety Bhawuk Jue, late of Green Bay, signed a three-year contract with San Diego.

The Eagles agreed to a one-year deal to keep veteran defensive end Hugh Downs.

While adding Pierce, the Giants cut two-year veteran receiver Lee Williams.

The Rams added their second linebacker in three days, signing Chris Claiborne for three years and \$10.5 million to go along with former Cowboy Dexter Coakley, who signed a five-year, \$14.5 million deal.

Houston signed linebacker Morton Greenwood, who started for Miami, to a five year, \$22.5 million deal, and re-signed defensive tackle Seth Payne.

Denver brought back linebacker Ian Gold, who played one season with Tampa Bay.

E. James downplays Dolphins rumors

By ALEX MARVEZ

South Florida Sun-Sentinel

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — The Miami Dolphins aren't the only NFL team Indianapolis running back Edgerrin James is interested in joining.

Despite speculation about his desire to return to South Florida, James said Thursday that his top priority was finding a team willing to give him an acceptable long-term contract extension. To James, that means re-signing with Indianapolis or finding a way to maneuver out of the franchise tag the Colts placed on him so he can land with another franchise.

"My main thing is playing football, making sure I've got a good deal in place and then going from there," James said while visiting the University of Miami's on-campus Pro Day for NFL scouts. "Everything else is secondary. ... I'm not going to say I'm inlined in on just one team."

James' availability in free agency is greatly limited because of the franchise tag, which would require any interested team to surrender two first-round draft picks and also tender a contract attractive enough to entice a signing. The Colts can match any offer but must surrender two first-round draft picks and also tender a contract attractive enough to entice a signing. The Colts think James, 26, is worth the money after he completed 2,031 total yards and 12 touchdowns in 2004.

Fans' interest in Drew Rosenhaus as a co-agent earlier this week sparked speculation that the decision was made to improve his chances of landing with the Dolphins. Asked whether that was the case, James laughed and said, "Drew to the rescue."

"I don't know. Everybody keeps trying to push me to Miami or whatever, but I'm open-minded to anywhere," said James, who played for the University of Miami in the late 1990s. "He (Rosenhaus) has the potential to make anything happen. If there's something out there that's possible, I know I've got the right man to make it happen."

While James was introduced as a general agent, he said Rick Spielman during Pro Day the franchise doesn't appear in position to acquire him because of salary-cap and compensation issues.



Edgerrin James said, "I'm not ... zoned in on just one team."

McCombs mulled firing Tice to prod Moss

By DON SEEHOLZER

St. Paul Pioneer Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — After weeks of denials and eight days of silence, Minnesota Vikings officials finally had his say Thursday on the Randy Moss trade. And still they were upstaged by owner Red McCombs.

During a conference call set up to discuss the Moss trade, McCombs said he was so disappointed in Moss' production last season that he thought about firing the man who was supposed to motivate Moss — coach Mike Tice.

"I seriously considered making that change to have an effect about the time that Randy was coming off his injury," McCombs said.

Moss returned to the lineup on Nov. 28 against Jacksonville after missing three games because of a hamstring injury.

McCombs said he thought a coaching change might give Moss "a spark" and that he had a replacement in mind.

McCombs said the would-be re-

placement never knew he was close to a job offer.

"He doesn't know it, he never will know it because he has no reason to," McCombs said. "But I have the coach in mind."

Before Wednesday, McCombs had never mentioned the possible coaching change to anyone, he said, not even to Tice. Tice first learned about it from McCombs about an hour before the conference call and tried to laugh it off.

"I gave serious thought to quitting, too," Tice said. "Sometimes I say I don't need this [stuff], so I guess we're even."

Why, after so many months, did McCombs choose Wednesday to go public with the story? "I wanted you to know how strongly I felt in trying to find a way in my mind that it would make sense to keep Randy," he said. "That was the extent to which I was prepared to go."

McCombs said he thought something had to change if Moss and the Vikings were to realize their potential.

"The bottom line is we had Randy seven years and we didn't do it," McCombs said. "Randy is the kind of guy who I think is a first-round pick in every year."

Tice took issue with the idea that the Vikings weren't getting the most out of Moss.

"I won't agree with that comment," he said. "I think we utilized Randy as best as we saw fit. We built our offense around him, so I don't know how else we could have got more out of him."

Moss caught 574 passes for 90 touchdowns during his time with the Vikings, and his 9,142 receiving yards are the most of any receiver through his first seven NFL seasons. The trade to Oakland became official on Wednesday, the Vikings received linebacker Napoleon Harris, the No. 7 overall pick in the upcoming draft and a seventh-round pick.

Moss was involved in more than his share of controversies, though, including two high-profile incidents near the end of last season.

McCombs, Tice and vice presi-

dent of football operations Rob Brzezinski all said no specific instance led to the trade, and each wished Moss well in Oakland.

Moss left the field at Washington with two seconds remaining in the team's last regular-season game, angering quarterback Daunte Culpepper and other teammates. A week later, he pretended to pull down his pants after catching a touchdown pass at Green Day, a gesture that drew a \$100,000 fine from the NFL.

Moss wasn't traded because those incidents, McCombs said, or because he had become a problem in the locker room.

"Randy's a good guy," McCombs said. "He's not a jerk. I like Randy a lot."

The Vikings have been criticized for not getting enough for Moss.

McCombs did not disagree. "As far as getting equal value for Randy, I knew we couldn't get value for Randy," he said, "not even if we'd have gotten twice what we got, because you can't measure the ability and potential that is in that player."

SPORTS



Big blockers make the biggest deals
on second day of signings, Page 31

Determined Deacon

Wake Forest guard Paul at ease in the spotlight

BY AARON BEARD
The Associated Press

Chris Paul hadn't taken a shot this season when he was anointed a candidate for national player of the year. But things changed after just a few games.

Following a freshman season in which Wake Forest's star point guard could do no wrong, his every move suddenly was being examined and his failures magnified as he led a team facing the highest expectations in program history. Now he's a constant target for opponents seeking to frustrate the fourth-ranked Demon Deacons.

Yet Paul responds to it all with a shrug. Handling the pressure, he says, is his job.

"Everyone is gunning for me," he said. "You're the captain when the ship's sailing, and you're the captain when it sinks. That's just one of the things you have to deal with."

The sophomore, the leading vote-getter on The Associated Press preseason All-America team, is averaging 15 points, seven assists and three steals per game. The numbers are similar to those of his Atlantic Coast Conference rookie of the year season, but Paul says he judges his play by one thing: wins. By that measure, Paul has improved substantially. Wake For-

est, which hopes to reach its second Final Four, earned its first No. 1 ranking in November and has been among the nation's elite all season.

It's no wonder that Paul, who grew up in near-by Lewisville, is so popular here. Yet the 19-year-old nicknamed "The Mayor" has had to fight for everything this season.

After appearing on the cover of countless preseason publications, Paul heard criticism after a slow start. In an early four-game stretch, he failed to score in double figures three times, and his 10-point effort in the fourth hardly mattered in a lopsided loss at Illinois.

While that criticism eventually subsided, the ultra-competitive 6-footer is constantly in the middle of on-court tussles — some created by his persistent defensive pressure on ballhandlers, others from opponents' efforts to irritate him with physical play.

"He's not going to back down from anybody," said Justin Gray, an all-ACC performer last year and Paul's roommate. In the second

matchup against Duke, coach Mike Krzyzewski started a walk-on who bumped and hacked Paul early to turn up the intensity in a top-10 matchup. Paul later picked up his second technical foul in as many games against the Blue Devils this season.

In last weekend's game against Virginia, Paul complained he was the victim of cheap shots after he was pushed around and shoved to the court — the latter incident leading to Wake Forest coach Skip Prosser's first technical this season.

"Everyone is gunning for me. You're the captain when the ship's sailing, and you're the captain when it sinks. That's just one of the things you have to deal with."

Chris Paul
Wake Forest point guard



Mickelson leads the assault on par at meek Doral

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Illinois wraps up another Big Ten championship

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Suns rally, put end to Pistons' wild ride through West

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Wake Forest sophomore Chris Paul, a preseason All-America selection, is averaging 15 points and seven assists a game for the Demon Deacons.

AP

Baseball's new drug testing policy goes into effect at camps Page 28

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